

## DECLARATION

Postgraduate Regulations 2,4,13 and 2,4,15

I declare that this thesis is entirely an original composition of mine and that apart from the clearly indicated direct quotations from my unpublished Oxford BLitt thesis Private Experiences it has not either in whole or in part, been submitted to any other university.

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PERSONS AND INDIVIDUALS -  
THE LANGUAGE OF ACTION

A philosophical examination of role theory and  
its implications

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## PREFACE

### Social Philosophy

Social philosophy could be one of the most important and most exciting subjects in our universities at the present time. In fact it scarcely exists. There are two main branches of social philosophy, one consisting of traditional topics and the other of more modern topics. The traditional topics are principally the philosophy of education, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of history and political philosophy. The more modern topics are the philosophy or philosophical critique of such activities as psychiatry, social work and possibly personnel management as well as the philosophy of the social sciences and of action.

The traditional topics are certainly all taught in our universities but their vital interconnections are usually entirely obscured by the academic structures of our universities which keep them completely separate from each other. The philosophy of law tends to be taught to law students in law faculties and the philosophy of education to education students in education departments. Political philosophy usually forms a rather strange sort of appendix to moral philosophy for philosophy students and it is usually taught under the title of 'political theory' to politics students. Only some philosophy students and some history students study the philosophy of history. Plato however saw a long time ago that the philosophy of education and the philosophy of politics are closely linked and must be studied together. In traditional language law is the will, or the expression of the will, of the sovereign and the sovereign may be a monarch or some kind of parliament or council. Alternatively we can say that law is the residue of politics or is the



means by which political decisions are put into effect. Whatever language is used it is clear that the study of law cannot be divorced from the study of politics and the philosophy of law equally cannot be divorced from the philosophy of politics.

Those who study the philosophy of the social sciences without reference to the philosophy of history make a grave mistake. Many sleepless nights are spent by some people who worry about the fact that the methodology of sociology is not the same as the methodology of physics and chemistry. Words are the tormentors that drive away sleep in this area. Since physics and chemistry are regarded as paradigm cases of science it is sometimes assumed that since sociology is called a social science it must either exhibit the same structure and use the same methods as physics and chemistry or suffer eternal damnation and be dismissed as a pseudo science. History is not called a science but it is an empirical subject that should be of interest to the social scientist. The historian can never confirm or disprove his hypotheses by experiment and very often the sociologist at any rate is in the same position. Also the historian is much more concerned with idiographic than with nomothetic matters and the social scientist may from time to time be in the same position. We shall discuss some of the differences between idiography and nomotheticity in chapter V. The philosophy of social science must make as much use of the philosophy of history as of the philosophy of science.

The emergence of political psychiatry in the USSR has alerted people to the political, moral and legal problems associated with psychiatry and with the concept of mental illness. Prof Szasz is no longer a voice crying in the wilderness. And even if he were he would deserve to be famous simply for pointing out that although psychiatrists tend to think that people should not commit suicide they also have a



higher than average suicide rate themselves. Social casework which is the centre of social work can be described as a form of psychotherapy and so social philosophers must pay almost as much attention to social work as to psychiatry.

So far our point of view has been extremely narrow and it is time to broaden our horizons to a certain extent. Although we have now probably indicated in a brief sort of way the extent of the concerns of the social philosopher it is necessary to point out that there are areas on the fringes of social philosophy which the social philosopher cannot entirely ignore even if they are not his primary concern. Let us in a few words point out two of these areas. The first is of very considerable importance and the second is of much less importance but it does deserve to be mentioned.

Ideologies are always with us and they are likely to confront the social philosopher at every turn especially in the philosophy of politics and the philosophy of education and in the philosophy of psychiatry and social control. It is almost beyond belief that the critical and comparative study of ideologies is not a major subject in our universities which make a bad situation worse by awarding degrees in the study of Christianity, quite improperly called simply theology, but not in for example either Judaism or communism. Religious studies departments try to place Christianity in a religious context by contrasting it with Buddhism. In a degree devoted to the critical and comparative study of ideologies Christianity would be seen in the much more meaningful context of Judaism, communism and fascism which are its ideological kith and kin. A study of the life and work of Hegel would clearly form an important part of the work for such a degree. At this point it is necessary to say that the so called radical philosophers have nothing to offer us in this area. As far as

one can make out they simply wish to remove Wittgenstein from the philosophical curriculum and to replace him by Marx. Replacing one boring form of narrow mindedness with another hardly seems a desirable move. The cult of the later Wittgenstein will die in due course and may already be weakening but it is to be hoped that the recovery of philosophy which should follow its death will not be delayed by an invasion of the followers of the cult of Marx. The establishment of university departments devoted to the critical and comparative study of ideologies seems to be urgently required along with the establishment of quite separate departments devoted to the study of individual ideologies such as Judaism and communism.

At first sight the theory of physical activities in the sense of sports, games and dance might not seem to be a matter of any importance for any type of philosophy but it could I think be a useful adjunct to the philosophy of action which as we shall see in chapter VI is part of social philosophy. The philosophical importance of physical activities is perhaps best brought out by asking what one needs to know in order to understand e.g. the Varsity Match or the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. In order to understand such events one needs to know about a surprising number of things and one needs to be able to see how they relate to each other. If one wishes to understand the varsity match a knowledge of the physiology of exercise and of the laws of rugby will not take one very far. One also needs to understand the significance of Oxford, Cambridge and London in order to make sense of a situation in which teams from two universities outside London play each other not at either of their own excellent rugby grounds but at the most prestigious rugby ground in London. The complexities of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games have been well described by Dr R D Mandell in his excellent book The Nazi Olympics which manages

to combine the best features of journalism and scholarship. In his Preface he writes (p x ) '... I shall claim that much of the success of the 1936 Olympics was due to the pursuit by the National Socialists of supremacy in mass pageantry . Hitler's success as a whole is inconceivable without the application of the contrived festivity that envelopped Nazism from beginning to end'. And later on he writes (p 291) 'The confident loosening of ambitions of the new Germans was the worst consequence of the onerous symbolic burdens that the Olympic Games and their athletic participants had taken on since the Games were revived in 1896'.

After our fairly wide ranging survey of the field of social philosophy it is necessary to state that in this work we are concerned with only one small corner of the field, namely the corner that is concerned with action.

Before we turn to our main concerns perhaps we should just note in passing that a few tentative steps have been taken towards the foundation of social philosophy. Some of the papers in Prof R T De George's book Ethics and Society are important and so are some of the papers in Prof A McIntyre and Prof Dorothy Emmet's book Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis. In addition to Prof Szasz's work in the field of the philosophy of psychiatry one should note Prof Flew's book Crime or Disease? and Dr A J P Kenny's British Academy lecture Mental Health in Plato's Republic



## INTRODUCTION

### Section 1 General - What the problem is

This work is concerned with a very important and very old question viz 'What is a person?' 'What is a human being?' 'What is a man? or even What is man?' That question has been of interest to philosophers and to practically everyone else for a very long time. The present discussion of the question arises from two very powerful philosophical stimuli that appeared at both the beginning and the end of the brilliant original period of linguistic analytical philosophy. Prof G Ryle's major work, The Concept of Mind may be said to have marked the beginning of that period. Possibly the only obscure and unfortunate passage in that work runs as follows (p 328)

Man need not be degraded to a machine by being denied to be a ghost in a machine. He might, after all, be a sort of animal, namely, a higher mammal. There has yet to be ventured the hazardous leap to the hypothesis that perhaps he is a man.

Man, Prof Ryle tells us, is a man, or rather, man is perhaps a man. One is not taking a hazardous leap if one suggests that most of us knew that before we read Ryle. At the beginning of the period then the question was raised about not very much light was shed on it.

The end of the period cannot be as clearly marked as the beginning but Prof A J Ayer's and Prof P Strawson's important discussion of the concept of a person can be regarded as providing the period with a worthy close. Their discussion however was limited to the epistemological aspects of the concept. It could be claimed that the

concept is primarily a social and moral concept and only secondarily an epistemological one. Since that discussion things have not been quite what they were but we must notice Prof Downie's and Miss Telfer's book Respect for Persons which gives us a modern restatement of the fundamental principle of Kant's moral philosophy. Certainly the principle of respect for persons is the most important one that has yet been enunciated in either morality or moral philosophy.

The present work concentrates on the social aspect of the concept because it is both fundamental and strangely neglected. A complete account of the concept and hence a complete answer to the question mentioned above would require a discussion of the moral and epistemological aspects of the concept and of the complete field of a certain branch of philosophy known by one or other of two equally unsatisfactory titles viz philosophical psychology and the philosophy of mind. Certain matters from the social and biological sciences would also be relevant to the discussions along with the matters raised in this work. We are then trying to consider one aspect or set of related aspects of a very important and complex concept.

The concept of a person is not the only one which has various aspects which are of interest to different branches of philosophy. Proper names have long been of interest to logicians but they are also of interest to social philosophers. Entities of social importance have proper names. Ships, towns, cities and pets have proper names and so do people. Prisoners, privates in the army and many of the products of factories have numbers and are often referred to by their numbers. Any complete account of proper names would have to take account of their social as well as of their logical function. It certainly cannot be claimed that the concept of a proper name is as complex as that of a person but it has at least two aspects and so it can serve as a simple



model when one is thinking about the idea of a concept having more than one aspect. Similarly the concept of promising or of a promise has long been of interest to moral philosophers who have been interested in moral obligations and prima facie duties. More recently linguistic philosophers have taken up the performative utterance aspect of the concept.

## Section 2 - Specific - How the problem will be tackled

One cannot understand what a person is without understanding what he does ie without understanding human action. If inhabitants of another planet were to land on the earth and remove some humans and take them for laboratory study they would doubtless learn a great deal about human anatomy, physiology and possibly also psychology. Psycho-physics and physiological psychology could certainly be adequately studied in some remote celestial laboratory. But only if those extra-terrestrial visitors set up a base on this planet and adopted the methods of the social anthropologist and the sociologist would they come to understand people. And we cannot understand what one person does without taking into account what other people do. If the specimens in the celestial laboratory were allowed to meet each other and to indulge in activities with each other the laboratory attendants might learn more about people than the scientific staff. But even the laboratory attendants would learn a lot if they set up camp in Edinburgh or Sydney and set out to observe the strange things people do in these places.

The fundamental concept involved in understanding human action is that of a social role. Part I (chapter 1 - 3) is devoted to that concept which is almost as complex as that of a person or at least if one says that it is one is indulging in a pardonable exaggeration. The

fatal error is to imagine that it is a simple concept. A sociologist might be surprised to hear this solemn announcement that the concept of a role is fundamental to the understanding of human action. The obvious, he might say, does not need to be stated. But what is obvious to him may not be obvious to philosophers and possibly to psychologists so Part I can be regarded as very necessary.

If we talk of roles we must also talk of those who occupy the roles and so we must talk of human individuals. Before we talk of human individuals it is useful to look at other types of individuals such as machines and animals. Part II (chapters IV and V) deals with these matters. The final part is concerned with some philosophical views of action seen in the light of the views put forward in Part I and with some of the implications of Parts I and II. In a sense the whole work is concerned with the concept of a role because only if we understand that concept can we hope to understand the social aspect of the concept of a person.

### Section 3 - The nature and style of the work

This work is concerned with synthetic, synoptic and contextual philosophy. It is not concerned with the important and valuable method of philosophical training known as linguistic analysis or analytical philosophy. Very briefly synoptic and contextual philosophy is based on the premise that understanding something is a matter of seeing it in relation to a context. Analysing things into their component parts is simply a step towards synopsis because the components must be seen in the context of each other if the thing of which they are components is to be understood. Alternatively the components themselves may be understood by being placed in another context as chemical elements are

understood by being placed in the periodic table. The point was well expressed in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1937 by Prof H J Paton when he spoke on the important subject of Fashion and Philosophy and said (p 6 ) 'I hold that the business of philosophy is to be synoptic .... Philosophical analysis seems to me to be valuable, not primarily for its own sake, but as a means to this wider end'. In the present work we are concerned with trying to understand human action by placing it in its social context. And indeed we are also concerned with understanding people by placing them in their social context.

It would not be appropriate to embark on a complete examination of synoptic and contextual philosophy here but such an examination would have to pay attention to immense Humean and Kantian questions. In such an examination attention would have to be paid to the views of the neo-Hegelian idealist philosophers which to a certain extent live on under the guise of structuralism. Particular attention would have to be paid to the idealists strange desire to fit everything into one all embracing context. Paton seems to have shared that desire to a certain extent because in the part we left out of the passage quoted above he talks of fitting 'our different experiences and our different theories as far as may be into a consistent whole' In this work we are not advocating support for the more monolithic and grandiose versions of contextualism.

From what has been said already it should be clear that the present work is on the outer fringes of British academic philosophy or rather of the present fashions in British academic philosophy. Talk about the centre and fringes of academic subjects has been clarified in relation to science by Dr M J Mulkey in his book The Social Process of Innovation where he writes (pp 28-9)

Let me summarise the argument presented in this section. People



enter science from various social backgrounds and with a variety of motives. Despite social variation among its members, the scientific community is able to maintain certain uniformities of thought and behaviour. This it does, in the first place, by rigorously excluding those unwilling or unable to conform intellectually and by insisting on a narrowly focused education calculated to produce strong commitment to the established body of knowledge. The mental sets created thereby are exceptionally stable. During graduate study the rigidity of scientific education is usually reduced as the neophyte is brought into contact with research developments whose status as scientific knowledge is not conclusively established and as he learns which topics can legitimately be regarded as problematic.

Once his research competence has been explicitly recognised, usually by the award of a PhD, the young scientist is formally free to pursue his own intellectual interests - unless he is engaged in large-scale group research. Informally, however, he remains subject to numerous social pressures; in particular, he is faced with the expectation that he will produce research findings acceptable to others working in the same field. Control over the content of his research output is exercised in several ways. In the first instance, close colleagues will warn him if his interests are becoming too deviant, as they warned Pasteur on several occasions. Secondly, funds will be forthcoming only if acceptable research proposals are presented. Finally, the editors and referees of the professional journals act as 'gatekeepers', rejecting submissions which do not conform to current cognitive and technical norms and, as we saw in the actions of Berzelius, Liebig and Wohler described above, using their position to condemn significantly deviant papers which slip through the screen. In such ways, then, do members of the research community strive to ensure that their colleagues conform to existing cognitive and technical norms. As a result most researchers are led to furnish acceptable information. Such information is rewarded with professional recognition which, in turn, brings other rewards such as promotion, increases in salary, additional research funds, tenure of positions of authority, honorific awards from the wider society, and so on. Thus the exchange of information for recognition is the main institutional mechanism whereby rewards are distributed and intellectual conformity maintained.

Philosophy, many people will want to say, was never as bad as that.

Certainly philosophers are free from the horrors of large scale group research and from the need for expensive equipment and materials. But in certain places in recent years there may have been strange pressures towards conformity in philosophical circles. The conformity has been much more concerned with the way in which problems are tackled than

with the choice of problems. Certainly in the better parts of Scotland in recent years there has been plenty of philosophical freedom but in certain parts of provincial England and in the outer darkness of Wales things may well have been different.

Talking about philosophy without reference to problems of truth and falsity is never entirely satisfactory but is sometimes valuable. In his British Academy lecture on Absolute Idealism Mr A M Quinton is not much concerned with truth and falsity and for that reason his lecture is in many ways not a serious discussion of his subject but he does throw light on some of the institutional problems of philosophy. He tells us that what he calls 'the very high level of technological unemployment of idealists within the philosophical profession' was helped by the fact that many of them became vice chancellors. At present unfortunately those who appoint vice chancellors are no longer as interested in philosophers as they once were. We can learn about the centre and fringes of philosophy from both Mulkey and Quinton. The philosophical problems of the centre and fringes of philosophy are clearly shown in the philosophy of religion where whaterer satisfies philosophers tends not to satisfy theologians and vice versa. Similarly works in social philosophy are likely to satisfy neither social scientists nor 'pure' philosophers. But despite the problems associated with them both social philosophy and the philosophy of religion raise important issues and deserve attention.

There is a certain reluctance in the present work to rush into philosophical argument and that is something of an understatement. The further away philosophers are from matters of pure logic the more careful they have to be before they rush into philosophical arguments and in social philosophy they are usually very far away from pure logic. In the course of our discussion we shall come across two clear cases of



philosophers rushing into argument and being tripped up by facts in such a way that the arguments have little value. In one case we shall find a philosopher asserting that imprisonment is the deprivation of liberty and does not cause distress. In a philosophy seminar such a remark might seem perfectly satisfactory but if one has actually had to deal with distressed prisoners and their even more distressed wives and parents one is liable to find the remark totally absurd. But even in a philosophy seminar it is to be hoped that the philosopher's further remark that capital punishment is simply the deprivation of life and does not cause distress would not sound sensible. The second case concerns role theory which as has already been indicated is a major concern in this work. In his book Roles and Values Prof R S Downie says (p 133) that it is 'as a person' that one 'accepts the rights and duties of a given role' and he goes on to say 'The morality of role acceptance is therefore necessarily not reducible to that of the role which is accepted. It is as persons plain and simple that we are responsible for the role we accept or reject.' As we shall see Downie's views are unsound even in relation to achieved roles but they do not begin to apply to ascribed roles of whose existence Downie gives the impression of being unaware.

A lot of space in this work is devoted to pointing out the details of role theory and so we may perhaps with luck avoid Downie's kind of mistake. In general we can say that pointing things out has an important part to play in philosophy. The philosophical study of pain illustrates this point very well. In his book Pain and Emotion Dr R Trigg points out with the help of empirical evidence the distinction between pain and the emotional reaction to pain. In future philosophical discussions of the subject it will not really be possible to ignore that distinction. Another important distinction in the same field concerns

pain and pain behaviour. That distinction is really only clear in the case of those under the influence of the drug curare and I have tried to draw attention to the relevant facts in the appendix to my unpublished Oxford B Litt thesis Private Experiences. In this work Chapters I - III are all concerned to a greater or lesser extent with pointing out the details of role theory although a variety of philosophical points arise out of these details. The main philosophical point about roles is not reached until chapter VI and even then it comes rather early in the day.

Before we start on the work itself it should perhaps be said that it contains many long quotations and many ~~fairly~~ short digressions. One cannot do justice to an important point of view simply by quoting a sentence or two. Often it is necessary to quote a paragraph or two. As far as digressions are concerned one can only say that the digressions in Beowulf are an inspiration to us all.

## Chapter I

### ROLES IN GENERAL

#### Section 1 - Towards a Definition

Analogies are sometimes important. Their importance in psychology is explained by Professor J Cohen in his book Homo Psychologicus where he writes (p 20)

The origin of many ideas in psychology can be traced to models based on analogies with ideas which were or are current in other disciplines. First, technology and then physics, chemistry, geology, mathematics, embryology and epidemiology, have each proved a source of stimulation. Even economics has had its uses in this respect.

And he continues (p 21) 'The history of psychology may indeed be regarded as a sequence of conceptions based on such analogies, the analogy being drawn with the dominant science of the time'. Later on he gives particular examples and one of them runs as follows :-

Piaget's imposing theory of intellectual growth might be described as an embryological psychology, for it traces the appearance, development and maturation of mental structures in the way the embryologist describes the development of bodily structures. Piaget began his career in zoology.

If we turn to philosophy we find that in that subject also analogies are important. Plato's cave (Republic Book VII), social contract theory, the argument from design and Wittgenstein's language games all remind us of that fact. The famous analogy which compares human society to a biological organism has a lot to answer for, including social surgery and much talk of the body politic. In his

book 'Metaphysics' (p 170) Professor W H Walsh says of metaphysicians that "they make frequent use of analogical reasoning; they have an eye for likenesses of structure more acute than that of most of us and a tendency to extrapolate readily from partially discerned to overall patterns" and that comment reminds us what an analogy is. It is a comparison and preferably an illuminating and important comparison. At its simplest, if I say that A is an analogy of B I am saying A is like B especially as regards structure and function. Dictionaries may no longer be as important as they once were in philosophy, but for what it is worth Chambers Dictionary defines 'analogy' as 'an agreement or correspondence in certain respects between things otherwise different; a resemblance of relations: parallelism; relation in general: a likeness'. Further light is thrown on the matter by Professor Max Black who in his book 'Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy' says "An analogue object is some material object, system or process designed to reproduce as faithfully as possible in some new medium the structure or web of relationship in an original".

Social roles are best defined analogically. A role is like a part in a play or a team position in a team game. If we wish to explain what an actor does on the stage we must make reference to the text of the play he is acting in because at the simplest level the actor is speaking the lines and carrying out the stage directions contained in that text. He pays primary attention to the lines and stage directions which relate to the character he is playing and which constitute his part. Similarly if we want to understand what a scrum half in rugby does we must refer to the rules of rugby football, for there we shall find a statement of the aims of the scrum half and the means which may and may not be used to try to achieve these aims. In the same way, if we wish to understand what a policeman does, we must refer to, amongst other



things, his instructions and standing orders because they will state some of the aims of police work and by what means these aims may and may not be achieved. It is as if the policeman were playing some very elaborate kind of game. Perhaps at first sight it might seem that games are more useful in this context than stage performances because off stage we do not normally speak lines and carry out stage directions, rather we try to carry out general and not very specific rules and instructions and try to achieve general goals and aims. But we must not forget improvisation which plays an important part in an actor's training. The instructor in an improvisation class may say to a student "Imagine you are an aging syphilitic lavatory attendant in Istanbul. A prostitute dressed in sea weed enters your latrine and has a miscarriage in front of you. Let us see how you cope with the resulting situation in your establishment." Only by the use of such methods was it possible to train actors for the Theatre of the Absurd. Filling a social role is more like carrying out a stage improvisation exercise such as the one given above than going on stage to act the part of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. There are however, ritualistic roles which are more easily understood by using the Hamlet rather than the improvisation analogy. On ceremonial occasions people speak lines and carry out stage directions as it were.

It might seem at this point that roles are a very simple matter because we have just explained them without very much effort. But there is a great deal more to be said. Not all of what remains arises directly from the analogical definition because life off stage and away from the sports ground is considerably more complicated than life at these places. Yet throughout this chapter, this part of the work and indeed, the whole work, it will be impossible to forget the analogical definition of a social role because it is basic and fundamental. A part



in a play and a team position in a team game are, as it were, simplified analogue models of a social role. The models are extremely useful because they enable us to see the basic structure of a complex concept. At the same time, these conceptual models are not so simple that they are in any danger of becoming caricatures. Indeed, a fair amount of our time will be taken up with pointing out and elaborating some of the extremely useful and illuminating features of these models.

Before we go on however, we must pause and consider an important objection to what we have said so far. Mr A R Louch in his book Explanation and Human Action writes (p 215) "We mean by acting a performance at variance with a genuine role or the normal appearance of a person. The analogue in daily life to a stage performances is, in other words, dissembling. But for a person to dissemble is for him to play a role which is not his or which he does not normally play. There must be a legitimate sense in which we can speak of him as acting. Consequently, the diagnosis of a person's actions as a performance depends upon the various activities that the individual (or team) generally engages in". Certainly it is the case that if we wish to understand what acting is we must meet or at least know about actors when they are off stage and not acting. But when we do that we are simply extending our knowledge of the role of the actor and we are confirming rather than refuting the dramaturgical explanation of action. And we can distinguish between genuine action in which the agent believes and histrionic action in which he does not. Roles are equally relevant to the understanding of either because we must understand the role which the agent is either genuinely or not genuinely playing before we can understand the actions in question. Possibly the man in the street talks more often about acting a part in the sense of dissembling than about role-theory, but role theory is in no way discredited because of that uninteresting fact

about ordinary life and ordinary language. The most common entrance to the stage of human life, if one may talk in an unavoidably dramatic manner, is the Homo sapiens vagina and the most common exit is the grave or the incinerator. We are, as it were, actors on a stage which we cannot leave until we die and on which we were born. In saying that however, we are not attempting to abandon all philosophical restraint and there is no intention of beginning to talk in the manner of an unfortunate series of Gifford Lectures which was published under the title of 'The Human Situation'. Roles are assigned even to those who try to escape from human society and so we talk of hermits, recluses, castaways and drop-outs. We might say that these roles show that the attempt to escape from roles is futile and impossible, or that the attempt to leave the stage is impossible. Perhaps we might say that sleepers and the unconscious do in a sense manage to go off stage. Ordinary language does not support us here since we talk about sleeping judges, surgeons and night watchmen, i.e. we talk about sleeping as if it were part of one's role performance, but clearly it is not unless perhaps one is a subject in some psychological or physiological experiment on sleep. If it is objected that sleeping people are not doing anything while actors often do quite a number of bizarre things off stage, then the point about the impossibility of escaping from the stage of life has been grasped because whenever we do anything or act, in the philosophical as opposed to the histrionic sense of the term, we are performing a role and we are on stage. Although we have just been noting a difference between our model and real life, there is a sense in which the model can still cope with the situation. An actor who falls asleep and not merely pretends to fall asleep during a play, goes in effect off stage, even if he remains on stage, because he withdraws from the play, unless he is from the point of view of the play already dead, but even then, snoring can

be a serious problem. At this point we shall leave the problem of the definition of the concept of a role but we shall return to it again in chapter II. Perhaps we now understand enough about roles to be able to turn to the extremely important topic of the relationship between roles and their occupants.

## Section 2 - Expectations and Attitudes

In this section we must first of all consider how the role performer is actually aware of the relevant rights, duties and conventions which constitute his role and which are, as it were, the improvisation instructor's directions. Naturally, he can always consult the official statement of rights and duties and he may be explicitly told about the conventions, as new recruits to most roles usually are, but there are more interesting and more subtle points to be considered. And although it may sometimes be true, and obviously true, that a role has no effect on its performers, yet that is, if anything, the exception rather than the rule. If one holds a role for any length of time, it is likely to affect one quite considerably, and in some cases, quite profoundly. The average person spends brief spells as a patient and is quite unaffected by them, but chronic patients are not so lucky and neither in a similar sort of way are those who have careers in medical work. It would be completely wrong to imagine that most roles are like clothes which can be slipped on and slipped off without leaving any mark. An actor's many parts may not leave any mark on him, but his role as an actor certainly will.

In most role situations people are likely to find that they are surrounded by those who expect them to act in accordance with the



conventions of the role. This is not simply a matter of superiors threatening dire consequences\*if the conventions are not obeyed, it is very often a matter of subordinates, colleagues, equals and people in related roles being uncooperative unless the role occupant in question acts in ways that they consider normal. A bus conductor who spent his time distributing political pamphlets instead of collecting fares would be likely to find that not only his superiors but also his passengers would be displeased. Pupils expect their teachers to behave like teachers, secretaries expect their bosses to behave like bosses and actors expect their directors to behave like directors. And teachers, bosses and directors cannot expect pupils, secretaries and actors to behave in accordance with the conventions of their roles unless they accept the conventions of their own related roles. A type of social contract operates here. If I abide by the conventions of my role people in related roles will abide by the conventions of their roles. But if I do not, they will not and chaos will follow because I shall have no idea what they are likely to do and they will have no idea what I am likely to do. It is because of that social contract that we can say with Drs N Gross, W S Mason and A W McEachern in their 'Explorations in Role Analysis: Studies of the School Superintending Role' (p 17) that "Individuals in social locations behave with reference to expectations". And by that we mean the expectations of those who surround them in these locations. Later on in the book (P 319) we find the view "..... human behaviour is in part a juncture of the positions an individual occupies and the expectations held for incumbents of that role ....." That view is really a generalised version of the previous one and it is to be supported. A concise expression of the importance of expectations in roles can be found in Prof. R Dahrendorf's essay 'Homo Sociologicus' where he writes "Between must, shall and can - expectations on the one hand and law, custom and



habit on the other, there is more than an analogy, the two sets of concepts apply to identical phenomena". Earlier in the essay he sheds useful light on these three types of expectations when he writes :-

"Must expectations are the hard core of any social role".  
"... most social roles include certain shall expectations, which are scarcely less compulsory than must expectations" and "... compliance with can-expectations is frequently a condition of advancement".

Now that we have seen how role occupants are made aware of their roles it is necessary to consider how roles affect people their occupants. The most important point to be made here about roles is that they influence attitudes which in turn influence action, both inside and outside the relevant role situation, and attitudes may remain long after the individual concerned has given up the role which influenced and possibly even formed them. It is partly because of their effect on attitudes that roles are extremely important and not, as we noted earlier, like clothes which can be slipped on and slipped off without any effect on the wearer. First of all we must try to see what attitudes are. Chambers Dictionary gives a definition that is so astoundingly bad that it deserves to be noticed. It runs as follows :-

"posture or positions: a studied or affected posture:  
(of aircraft) position relative to the normal line of flight,  
ground or wind: any condition of things or relation of persons  
viewed as expressing some ~~thought~~ feeling, etc."

'Doubtless very sound on aircraft but very weak on people' is really the only possible comment on that definition. Prof. C L Stevenson in his paper on 'Ethical Fallibility' gives us a very brief but somewhat simple minded and crude definition when he says "By attitudes I refer to tendencies to be for or against something, as typified by liking, disliking,

approving, disapproving, favouring, disfavouring, and so on". That is true as far as it goes, but there is so much more to be said. The late Prof. J Drever in his Dictionary of Psychology does very much better. He defines "attitude" as "a more or less stable set or disposition of opinion, interest or purpose, involving expectancy of a certain kind of experience, and with an appropriate response; sometimes used in a wider sense, but rather less definitely, as in "aesthetic attitude" in the sense of a tendency to produce artistic results, or a social attitude in the sense of being sensitive to social relations, social duties or social opinions....." Indeed Drever's definition seems to be as good as those which Dr T M Newcomb tells us in his paper On the Definition of Attitude have probably been the most influential in psychology. They are Allport's "An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" and D Krech's and R S Crutchfield's "An attitude can be defined as an enduring organisation of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world". The psychologists do not seem to give enough attention to the evaluative aspects of the concept but Stevenson is wrong to emphasise that aspect to the exclusion of all others.

A very good account of the cognitive aspect of attitudes is given by Dr S E Asch in his paper, 'Attitudes as Cognitive Structures' where he writes:

"An attitude contains a more or less coherent ordering of a variety of data. It sometimes makes sense, for example, to say that a person has a certain position on civil liberties, on public ownership, on the rights of minorities, or on a current political crisis. What we mean by this statement is that the variety of observations and arguments that he brings forward are in some measure unified and that they converge to make a case. They

stand in an ordered relation to each other; they are distinguishably different from an aggregation of statements that happen to refer to the same problem. What the person says at one point is understandably connected with what he has stated earlier or will say later, in the same way that the parts of a story are sensibly connected. It is on this basis that we undertake to foretell how a person is likely to respond to a new development".

And he gives a good example of what he means when he writes slightly later on :-

"When someone defends the system of capitalistic enterprise on the ground that it has raised living standards, that it promotes individual initiative and offers the best conditions for the expression and reward of talent, and that it is most compatible with the liberties of individuals, the strength of the position derives, it would seem, precisely from the mutual support that the various assertions offer one another".

Perhaps we can now begin to see what attitudes are and how important they are. Conceptual geography is part of an old fashioned syndrome. Those who make use of it are likely to be found doing absurd things such as unpacking concepts and even talking about the furniture of the universe. But if we are aware of its dangers we can use its language quite safely and say that attitudes are to be found in the same area as views, opinions and beliefs. Facts, values and emotions are all involved in attitudes. The facts are seen in the light of the individual's values which are closely connected with his emotions. A fair amount of emotion is likely to be involved in the expounding and defending of attitudes. The importance of attitudes should now be quite obvious. If we know and understand someone's attitudes we know and understand a very great deal about that person.

The influence exerted by roles on attitudes is a matter of common knowledge and observation. The danger is that in doing justice to it



one is liable to end up talking about caricatures and stereotypes, which make no allowance for individuality and idiosyncrasy. Not all schoolmasters are boys amongst men though one does hope that they all manage to be men amongst boys. A vice chancellor once told a conference of university administrators that although professors made a great deal of fuss about the time they had to waste on committees, they made a great deal more fuss when they were not elected to them. Certainly all who attended the conference knew the truth of what he was saying, but even university administrators have to admit that it is possible to meet a few genuine scholars in any university. The sincere dislike of genuine scholars for committees and administration is quite different from the false dislike which the majority of academics voice endlessly. Role pressure is very strong in this matter. Any academic who openly said he enjoyed administration would be exposing the myth of the academic world that all who hold academic posts are genuine scholars. And so the most enthusiastic committee men are required to moan at great length about the fact, or rather alleged fact, that they cannot get on with their real work because of time wasting administration. One might say fairly confidently that the writings of Cardinal Newman, T S Eliot and the Spanish mystics such as St. John of the Cross, would be most unlikely to appeal to a presbyterian clergyman. Yet I was brought up by such a clergyman who had a very considerable interest in precisely these writings and published papers on some of them. And doubtless there are socialist stockbrokers. Not all judges, one may surmise, are totally narrow minded and reactionary and so on. The best appreciation of role attitudes possibly arises when they are wrongly but reasonably assumed to apply to oneself. An assistant prison governor who would rather expose the police than cover up for them may be shocked to find that borstal boys' parents may simply assume without question that he is in league with the police.



The shock is likely to be intensified when he appreciates that the parents' belief is entirely reasonable. Yet, after one has made due allowance for individuality and idiosyncrasy, one must acknowledge the very considerable influence exerted by roles in attitudes. A certain theologian who had spent almost his entire life in Oxford was said to find it difficult to take seriously any form of organisation between the college and the cosmos. The results of a survey amongst certain undergraduates showed that they would pay vice chancellors considerably more than civil service permanent under secretaries. Evidently it has been found that army officers do not fit into posts in industry easily without special courses of introduction and reorientation because they tend to see workers as other ranks who should accept orders without question. It is difficult for an ex officer to accept the idea of discussing matters with shop stewards and negotiating with trade union officials. If one prefers experiment to anecdote, then there is the case quoted by Dr. Asch in his paper on Attitudes as Cognitive Structures of an experiment in which two groups of people were used. One of the groups consisted of employees in a labour organisation, the other was composed of business men. They were selected on the assumption that they were likely to be biased in opposite directions on given issues. The results indeed pointed clearly in the predicted directions. The business men judged the facts erroneously according to their general position, and so did the labour group. The whole matter has been expressed extremely vividly and extremely well by another psychologist, Dr. A C Elms who writes in the preface to the volume he edited entitled Role Playing, Reward and Attitude Change.

"Role playing is one of the great natural persuaders. We learn early to mouth opinions which are not our own; and if we express them often enough, they seem almost inexorably to become our own.

In many instances this process of self-persuasion appears even more powerful than the direct attempts of others to influence us. As Pascal said "We are more easily persuaded, in general, by the reasons we ourselves discover than by those which are given to us by others".

The effects of role playing are pervasive. Role playing may well be one of the central processes by which children internalize the attitudes emphasized by their family and their society. Military recruits come to feel more combative, and young executives more businesslike, in part through the outward portrayal of roles assigned to them by their seniors in command. Arguments are still heard that civil rights legislation and Supreme Court decisions may change public behaviour, but can't "change the hearts and minds of men". Such arguments ignore substantial evidence that legally enforced changes in the public behaviour of Southern whites toward Negroes - role playing in other words - have been followed by significant positive changes in attitudes toward integration.

Psychological practitioners have made frequent use of role playing: to alter patients' self-concepts through psychodrama therapy; to produce faster acceptance of "professional attitudes" by student teachers and student nurses; to promote greater mutual understanding on the part of management and union leaders in collective bargaining sessions".

From the philosophical point of view attitudes are extremely important because they show us that it is not always possible to separate and sharply distinguish between reasons and causes in relation to belief and action. People are normally prepared to argue vehemently and at length in defence of their attitudes which they regard as important. And in the course of these arguments they are likely to quote role experience which has acted causally upon them as reasons for holding the attitudes in question. A particular example may help to make matters clear. Those who like myself believe that criminals are neither wicked and deserving of punishment, nor sick and requiring treatment, are likely to regard that attitude as an important one at the present time, because it is not yet widely held, and so we are prepared to argue fairly vehemently, and at fair length about the matter. And in the course of the argument role experience is likely to be quoted amongst one's reasons for holding the attitude, despite the causal nature of the influence of role experience.

In my own case I would wish to argue, as I expect would most others who hold the attitude in question, that deviance theory is sounder than traditional criminology. Saying that means rejecting the idea that there is some characteristic which we can call criminality which is found in criminals but not in others. Indeed if we wish to make use of the concept of criminality at all we must regard it as a label which is applied to certain people by the police and the courts within the general framework of the criminal law. In the General Conclusion we shall return to this point when we consider the common sin of individualising social phenomena.

In looking at reasons for holding that attitude and at the cause and role experience which are involved in these reasons I shall have to make use of my own case however tiresome that may be. The roles of student of philosophy and assistant prison governor have a lot to answer for as far as my own holding of the attitude outlined above is concerned. In the course of my philosophical studies I came to adopt a modified utilitarian position on moral matters and to adopt the view that punishment cannot be justified. These views constitute reasons for rejecting any policy of punishing people who have been found guilty of offences against the criminal law. But only as a result of being a student of philosophy was I given a chance of considering and adopting and supporting the arguments involved in these views. As far as I can remember when I became an assistant prison governor after I had been a student of philosophy for a number of years I held the view that criminals are in some sense or other disturbed and in need of some kind of treatment given either by psychiatrists or social workers. In other words I held the only popular alternative to the view that criminals are wicked and deserving of punishment. As an assistant prison governor however, I soon became aware of two types of prisoners. One type is described in prison files and the other type walks about prisons. Only by reading prison



files can we discover the phantom criminality. The more one interviews prisoners the less one is likely to believe in its existence unless one allows all one's interviewing experience to be coloured by a belief in its existence. That point is well illustrated by the fury of a senior prison social worker when he read a report by one of his subordinates which described a prisoner as normal and well balanced etc. He told his subordinate that she simply had not probed deeply enough in her interview because in his view the man would not be in prison unless there was something wrong with him.

Only a prison official can read prison files and possibly only one who has had the good fortune to study philosophy can appreciate the purely evaluative force of such terms as 'inadequate', 'immature' and 'personality defect' which are used endlessly to condemn prisoners and to sustain a belief in criminality which is extremely common amongst those who write reports on prisoners. Clearly the senior social worker mentioned above wanted these terms or roughly similar ones used in order to produce the usual type of condemnatory report and he was angry because his subordinate challenged the myth of criminality. Perhaps we can now see how reasons and the causal effect of role experience can be used together when one is trying to explain and justify holding an attitude. The causal effect of role experience can lead to and strengthen reasons.

### Section 3 - Role Interpretations and Variations

After considering what roles do to people it is appropriate to consider what people can do with roles and how they can interpret them and express their individuality through them. It is commonly thought that roles leave no room for individuality. They tend to be seen as railway tracks along which people run like trains. The interpretative arts



however remind us that even in situations where people follow very precise instructions these can in fact be immense scope for individual interpretation. The pianist and the actor have in one sense simply to play certain notes or speak certain lines. Yet the scope for their individual interpretations is in fact more or less infinite. And there is room for individual interpretation in a large proportion of roles. It would be a mistake to think that one can express one's individuality only if one can devote one day a week to discussing the reform of the PPE syllabus and another to possible solutions of the problem of traffic on the High. There may be much more scope for individuality in many working class roles than many middle class people imagine. When one's train stops apparently for ever at White City one can listen to what the guards say to each other. Often they talk about their colleagues role interpretations. Bill we learn is famous for looking up and down the platform an inordinate number of times before he lets his train continue on its journey and so on. Possibly any sign of life and humanity is likely to stand out more prominently at White City than it would elsewhere. Yet even there we can learn of scope for individuality that we might not have known about. At the same time it is important to criticise roles that do not give sufficient scope for individuality. Driving trains from West Ruislip to Epping must be more interesting and more creative as it were than collecting tickets all day at either of these two places. In general we can say that each occupant of a role has what might be called his role style, the manner in which he carries out his duties. Most people prefer cheerful bank clerks to sullen bank clerks and officiousness is regarded as a sin. One's role style is generally a reflection of one's psychological characteristics. Certain roles give their occupants a lot of scope for initiative and in certain cases we can talk meaningfully of what x has done with his job or made

of his post. Roles place limits on the behaviour of their occupants but within these limits there is scope for individuality and some roles as those of President of the USA or Secretary General of the United Nations give their occupants a great deal of scope while other such as bank clerks or factory workers give very little scope, but all role occupants are liable to cause themselves trouble if they try to adopt individual attitudes to the limits of their roles. A President of the USA who acts unconstitutionally will find himself in serious difficulties or at least he may do and a bus conductor who refuses to wear the appropriate uniform will almost certainly lose his job. In certain cases however individuals can change the nature of their roles. Erving Goffman calls this role enterprise in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life p 15 and defines it as 'a process in a particular social establishment whereby a particular member attempts not so much to move into a higher social position already established as to create a new position for himself, a position involving duties which suitably express attitudes that are congenial to him. Role enterprise need not go so far as the creation of entirely new roles. Sometimes particular individuals perform so brilliantly more or less within the established limits of a role that they are examples of the role at its very best and so we talk admiringly of Daniel, Jowett and Florence Nightingale and only slightly less admiringly of Daniel, a Jowett or a Florence Nightingale.' In other words if x is an outstanding occupant of a role the expression 'an x' may come to be used as a recognition of high ability in the role. People like Jowett and Florence Nightingale realise the unrealised potentialities of a role and in doing so they in effect change it slightly. Not all roles are assumed voluntarily but many are and individuality should be sought as much in a person's choice of roles as in his performance within any role. One learns a great deal about the individuality of a bank clerk when one

knows that he is the secretary of a horticultural society and a member of a swimming club.

In this chapter we are trying to understand the complexity of roles. Some of that complexity arises from their possible combinations and their synchronic and diachronic variations. Consider the case of an ambassador who goes to a reception at an embassy other than his own in the country where he is stationed. During the reception he simultaneously occupies the roles of ambassador of country x to country y and guest at a reception in the embassy of country z in country y. The relations between x and y and x and z and z and y will have an important bearing on his behaviour at the reception. Normally in such a situation the role of guest might take slight precedence over the role of ambassador but an urgent message from his own embassy might very well reverse the situation. The role of doctor provides a good example of synchronic and diachronic variations despite the fact that throughout all these variations the primary task of the role viz attempting to heal disease and relieve suffering remains unaltered. From the synchronic point of view we can see for example the differences between private enterprise and state organised medicine and between a male dominated and non male dominated profession. These differences become clear if one looks at medicine in the USA, UK and USSR at the present time. From the diachronic point of view one can see an improvement in social status and an increase in the use of technology and equipment and in specialisation. The doctor who entered his patient's house by the back door did not use much if any equipment he could not carry his bag and he did not refer his patient to a specialist. And so we can see that talk of the role of the doctor is unlikely to do justice to the role's diversity. One does not find oneself simply in a role but rather in one particular variation or version of a role at a particular place and at a particular time. The role of company secretary for



example is likely to vary in many ways from company to company.

#### Section 4 - Biological Roles

There is one type of role which is extremely important from several points of view. The roles in question are biological roles which are very widespread in the sense that everyone occupies not only one but in fact several of them. In addition the existence of that type of role raises important questions about different types of explanation of human behaviour and action. By a biological role one means a vertical ascribed role which is ascribed primarily on the basis of the possession of certain biological characteristics. Vertical roles are those which cut through social classes which can be regarded as horizontal strata of society which give rise to horizontal class roles. In other words vertical roles can be and are occupied by people from all social classes. It can be said that biological roles involve a combination of biological and social explanations of human action and behaviour. Perhaps it would be helpful therefore to glance briefly at the various possible types of explanation of behaviour and action.

The main types of explanation of action and behaviour are social, biological, psychological, theological, moral and metaphysical. Social explanations make use of concepts such as role, class, social mobility and social conflict. Biological explanations use concepts such as instincts and drive and may regard human beings as simply complicated animals and human societies as simply complicated versions of animal societies. Psychological explanations use such concepts as learning, memory, needs, personality, intelligence, and use the concept of intention in the way that G W Allport uses that concept. Theological explanations use such concepts as sin, grace and salvation. Moral



explanations make use of such concepts as free will, choice, decision, duty and obligation. Metaphysical explanations use concepts such as mind and mental processes and may use such concepts as soul and volition. It may be claimed that catalogues of concepts are of little value and that in any event the catalogue above is particularly useless since it is incomplete from the philosophical point of view. In chapter six we shall be concerned with philosophical explanations of action that give a central place to the concepts of limb and muscle movements. At the same time it can be claimed that although a satisfactory account of each type of explanation would really have to be quite extensive we have nevertheless indicated in at least a very rough and ready sort of way what the main types of explanation of action behaviour are.

It is of philosophical interest to note that each type of explanation can take either an inclusive or an exclusive form and all of the types except the biological can take either a determinist or a free will form. The last point can be explained first by saying that each type of explanation except the biological is compatible with either determinism or libertarianism. The first point means that each of the types of explanation can be taken either to exclude all the others or to include some or all of the others. Only the exclusive form of the biological type is incompatible with free will. Presumably however the exponent of the exclusive biological type of explanation believes that his views result from a rational consideration of the relevant evidence and are not simply the product of his own instincts, drive and hormones. In other words if one argues for the exclusive biological type of explanation one ipso facto does not believe in it or support it. The exclusive forms of the types of explanation are heroic but uninteresting. Anyone who argues for a totally social explanation of human action and behaviour is simply ignoring the biological facts of life and vice versa. Worse

still anyone who argues for either an exclusive theological or exclusive metaphysical explanation is not merely ignoring social, biological and psychological phenomena but is also basing his explanation on existential claims that can be regarded as extremely weak. The interesting and important forms of the types of explanations are inclusive. A study of biological roles enables us to see something of the complexity and value of the inclusive forms of the types of explanation. The main biological roles are chronological, sexual and racial and we shall look at each of these varieties of biological roles in turn.

Chronological roles are perhaps the simplest of biological roles. The extreme physical weakness of infants and the senile means that their social position must be one of considerable dependence if they are to survive. It might be argued that dependence is the only factor in common between the social position of an infant and of a senile person. But there may be other factors in common as well. Dependent people tend to take their social status from those on whom they are dependent. The infant child of x has the social status of x and an inmate of a home for the aged may to a very considerable extent have the social status of the home. Certainly a ninety year old widow living in an institution has a social status that contains elements derived from the social status of her late husband and her children. Her social status would in some ways be quite different if she lived with her children because her physical proximity to them would emphasise her status as their mother. If however her children are rarely able to visit her in her home for the aged then her social status may derive as little from them as it does from her late husband. The example we are considering enables us to see roles and status and the biological and social factors involved in them quite clearly. The status of a role can vary a great deal and occupants of the same role do not necessarily have the same status or social standing. It might be

argued that the role of very young or very old dependent persons explains primarily the behaviour and actions of those on whom the person is dependent rather than of the dependent person himself. In as much as the behaviour of a dependent person follows on from the behaviour of the people on whom he is dependent this view is correct. A senile person can eat only when someone else provides a meal. Equally however those who look after the old may say that they supply meals only when their charges need them. It is more important to note that infants and the senile may not be regarded as being capable of action and so the only actions in their situation may be those of the people who look after them. Since infants cannot speak and so cannot supply anything that could be regarded as reasons for ~~or justifications~~ or explanations of what they do it is reasonable to regard them as being incapable of action. The case of the senile is somewhat more complicated since we are likely to want to say that although they may often be very confused and incapable of action yet from time to time their former abilities may return and may be completely aware of what they are doing. Possibly it is reasonable to say that the roles of infant and senile person are passive ascribed roles which can be occupied by those who are totally incapable of action.

Between infancy and senility chronological biological factors take second place to social factors. Puberty is a biological and psychological landmark in the history of the individual but in our society it is not an event of particular social importance. The stage at which people are allowed to assume full adult rights and responsibilities in our society is a matter of conventions that are not directly linked to puberty. It may perhaps at times be somewhat vaguely assumed that certain adult rights are responsibilities that cannot be exercised until after puberty but the matter is not normally discussed. Marriage before puberty may be undesirable but it is not necessarily clear why people should not vote



before puberty.. Adolescence greatly complicates matters and makes confusion worse confounded. Puberty may mark the beginning of adolescence but it is not entirely clear what marks its end. The problem cannot be solved by saying that adolescence comes to an end with the adoption of a completely adult form of life because, both 'adolescent' and 'adult' are highly evaluative terms. Things which are called adolescent are generally regarded as inferior to things which are called adult. It is important to emphasise however that, what is adult to one person may be adolescent to another and vice versa. The problem is not solved but only restated by saying that adults are mature and adolescents are not entirely mature because 'mature' is a very highly evaluative word when it is applied to human beings. The topic of maturity will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. Mercifully it is sufficient for our present purposes to note that the end of adolescence is not marked by any biological event or events. Reproduction does not by itself mark the end of adolescence and incidentally we might as well note that neither does parenthood although parenthood is primarily social rather than biological. Whatever marks the end of adolescence must be to a large extent if not entirely social even if we cannot state what precisely it is. A powerful example of the priority of social over biological factors is provided by Dr Margaret Mead in her book Culture and Commitment in which she writes :-

"The distinctions I am making among three different kinds of culture-postfigurative, in which children learn primarily from their forebears, configurative, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and prefigurative, in which adults learn also from their children - are a reflection of the period in which we live. Primitive societies and small religious and ideological enclaves are primarily postfigurative, deriving authority from the past. Great civilisations, which necessarily have developed techniques for incorporating change, characteristically make use of some form of configurative learning from peers, playmates, fellow students and fellow apprentices. We

are now entering a period, new in history, in which the young are taking on new authority in their prefigurative apprehension of the still unknown future".

The biological aspects of childhood are basically the same in the three types of society and so differences amongst them that relate to childhood are caused by social and technological factors. And precisely the same point can be made about adulthood. As far as chronological roles are concerned therefore we can say that only at the extremes of infancy and senility are biological factors dominant over social factors. Even that statement may have to be modified in favour of social factors because in some societies old people including the senile are revered while in others they are neglected and shunned. Biological factors cannot explain the differences between these types of society.

Sexual roles seem at first sight to be a matter of social boundaries following biological boundaries. People are either male or female from the biological point of view and also from the social point of view. Accounts given by anthropologists of societies in which what we regard as normal sex role behaviour seem to be reversed do not in any sense complicate matters. A society in which women are more aggressive than men is likely to have just as strong and important sex roles as one in which men are more aggressive than women. Homosexuality is perhaps the biggest complicating factor as far as the simple picture of sex roles is concerned if heterosexuality is one of the assumptions on which that picture is based. To a greater or lesser extent the psychological and social life of a homosexual may be said to run counter to his or her physical sex if heterosexuality is regarded as the norm. A society which is rigidly divided on a heterosexual basis is unlikely to have any room outside prisons and mental hospitals for people who are openly homosexual. If a society allows people to be openly homosexual without

suffering any penalty or stigma then almost inevitably the sex role situation in that society will be somewhat fluid. The simple picture of the sex role situation suffers serious damage when we begin to look at some of the complexities of the biological factors involved. Disputes about the sex of some Olympic athletes are quite well known and remind us of the distinction between genetic and somatic sex. Only those whose genetic sex corresponds to their somatic sex are fertile in the biological sense of the term. It might be said that as far as the vast majority of people are concerned this point is purely academic and simply does not affect the general picture. Those who say that might readily agree that women on average seem to live longer than men. Comparatively lengthy widowhood does seem to be part of the sex role situation. But in an important and interesting article published in the journal 'The Listener' on the 17th August 1972 and entitled simply Men and Women Dr. W M S Russell shows us that matters are considerably more complicated. He writes :-

Aristotle had two concubines and a daughter and he went on record with the statement that men have more teeth than women: generalisations about the two sexes are apt to be made rather lightly. But when modern textbooks tell us that, on average women live longer than men, they are basing the conclusion on copious and reliable evidence obtained in a number of countries. The trouble is that these countries are all of a certain kind. The countries of the world can be divided into two groups. In the first group, people can generally expect to live something like three score years and ten, and here women live longer than men. In the second group, both sexes can on the whole expect much shorter lives, and here men live longer than women. The first group includes European countries such as Hungary and Sweden, but also others such as Canada and Japan, so the difference between the two groups is not one of region or race. The longer-lived countries are roughly speaking, the industrialised ones, where modern medical services are most highly developed.

Later on he talks about the reasons for this situation and writes :-

Since women live longer than men in industrial societies why do



they die younger in pre-industrial ones? Part of the answer is provided by the hazards of childbirth. In a modern industrial society, we have advanced obstetrical methods, considerable control over infection, anaesthetic techniques to reduce pain and shock, medical services during pregnancy, abortion for cases of heart, lung or kidney disease, contraception to delay the first pregnancy and reduce the total number of pregnancies. All these factors must make childbearing safer for women, not only reducing the number of outright deaths, but also reducing the strain on health produced by repeated pregnancies.

Now he begins to complicate the picture he has drawn by saying :-

There remains another question. Since men live longer than women in pre-industrial societies why do they die younger in industrial ones? Before the facts about pre-industrial societies were known, when it was believed that men always died younger on average, it was generally assumed that women were inherently fitter, and therefore longer-lived than men. This could still be true. Relieved from the special stresses we have considered, in societies where everyone lives longer, women may at last be able to benefit from a difference of this kind. The chromosome mechanism of sex determination is more complex than we had formerly thought, but it is so designed that it could confer genetic advantage on the female. Women have a lower basal metabolic rate and steadier blood pressure than men: obvious evolutionary adaptations for the protracted energy drain of pregnancy and labour.

Towards the end of his article Russell complicates matters still further saying :-

It is natural now to wonder whether modern industrial men would die so much younger than women if they were not subjected to some special stresses - just as women are in pre-industrial societies. In industrial societies, substantially more men than women go out to work and are thus subjected to more competitive pressures and burdensome responsibilities as well as industrial health hazards and the fatigue and strain of long-distance commuting. Men in these societies, compared with women present greater rates of accidents, stress diseases of the circulation, alcoholism and suicide.

It should now be clear that our original idea that sexual roles are simply a matter of social boundaries following biological boundaries is completely untenable since social factors influence human biology.

Once we move away from the purely biological field into areas

that are psychological and social it is simply not clear what produces difference between the sexes. In her book Intelligence and Personality Dr Alice Heim has a chapter which has the title 'The Mediocrity of Women'. And that chapter has the brave and cheerful subtitle 'Vive La Difference'. At the beginning of that chapter Dr Heim writes :-

Five points are worthwhile making on the cognitive differences between males and females. First, there is a tendency for men to be 'more so' than females, whatever is being tested. Thus on intelligence tests, for instance, when groups of comparable young men and women take tests, they tend to gain mean scores which are similar, but the highest and the lowest scorers are liable to be male. This finding is not confined to intelligence tests or even to psychological tests in general. It applies also to academic examinations. There is a tendency for women students to gain proportionately more second class degrees - and, thus fewer firsts and thirds - in many examination subjects. This applies even to Oxbridge where, owing to the sex ratio in the university, the competition for Oxbridge places among girls leaving school is stiffer than it is among boys. It might therefore have been supposed that these young women, being still more highly selected would obtain a higher proportion of first class degrees. This is not the case, however, and in my opinion, the reason is not simply prejudice on the part of the (predominately male) examiners.

In the 'real world' situation, the same tendency holds: men rather than women are found at the extremes. There are more male geniuses, more male criminals, more male mental defectives, suicides and stutterers, more colour blind males, than females. The list is a long one, with relatively few exceptions. Whether this is due primarily to the biological functions of women may become clarified within the next half-century. In any case, the fact that there are far more eminent men than women, past and present, is not wholly explicable on sociological grounds - i.e. that higher education for women is less than a hundred years old, that until recently it was not considered quite nice for a woman to have a career; and that even now a professional career for a woman is thought by many to be incompatible with, and inferior to, wifehood and motherhood.

Perhaps we can now say that the boundaries between the sexes are as much social as biological. Only the mechanisms of reproduction are purely biological. Social factors are to be found in every other area including techniques of intercourse. The phrase 'the missionary position' if it means anything, reminds us of that fact.

Racial roles have even weaker biological foundations than sexual roles. Possibly at the present time many people think of race primarily in terms of skin colour and secondarily in terms of various facial features such as the size and shape of the lips and the nose. General body build and type of hair are also probably involved in the same concept of race. There is absolutely no reason why these features of a person's appearance should be regarded as being of greater social significance than colour of hair or eyes or height or girth. A society in which fat people and people with fair hair are given low social status is certainly a logically possible society and it would be just as rational a society as one in which people with black skins are given low social status. The fact that skin colour is an extremely obvious feature of a person's appearance may be relevant to the importance that is sometimes attached to it but it is certainly not a justification for that importance. Equally the fact that in many societies white skin ranks socially higher than black skin is without justification but may perhaps be partially explained by the historical accident that at one time some white people owned black slaves rather than vice versa.

As far as our purposes are concerned there is probably not very much more that needs to be said about race but we might as well glance briefly at definitions of the term 'race' given by Dr P L van den Berghe in his book 'Race and Racism' where he writes :-

The term "race" has been quite confusing because of its four principal connotations.

- 1 Physical anthropologists have called races the various subspecies of homo sapiens characterized by certain phenotypical and genotypical traits (e.g. the "Mongoloid race" or the "Negroid race"). They have not agreed among themselves, and biological classifications of the human species include three to more than a score of such races (14). Belatedly, many physical anthropologists



are abandoning racial taxonomies altogether.

- 2 Laymen have profusely used the word race to describe a human group that shared certain cultural characteristics such as language or religion (e.g. the "French race" or the "Jewish race").
- 3 Race has been loosely used as a synonym for species (e.g. the "Human race").
- 4 Many social scientists have meant by race a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics. These physical characteristics are in turn believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual, and other non-physical attributes or abilities.

It is perhaps possible to raise certain doubts about the second of van den Berghe's points. Racial disputes and problems tend to concern 'laymen' rather than physical anthropologists or social scientists and physical attributes have been at the heart of all disputes and problems arising from racial discrimination. The racial aspects of German fascism were as much based on physical characteristics as are the racial aspects of Boer fascism. Cultural characteristics tend to be regarded as of secondary importance to physical characteristics. Clearly if one is trying to run a racially segregated society as the German fascists did and as the Boer fascists are doing one wants to be able to segregate people easily and quickly. Physical characteristics rather than religious belief are likely to determine the right of entering into the appropriate public lavatories in such a society. Our original point about the weak biological foundations of social roles is confirmed by van den Berghe when he writes (p 11). - "It is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates races, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant".

Before we leave the topic of biological roles there are two main points that should be noted. The first is that the three types of biological role interact with each other. We can say that there are

chronological aspects of sexual roles or alternatively we can say that there are sexual aspects of chronological roles. The psychosexual development that is much talked about in psychiatric and social work circles can be described in either of these ways. And there can be chronological and sexual aspects of racial roles. In British society at the present time for instance it appears to be the case that West Indian women and girls find it very much easier to get jobs than West Indian men especially perhaps young men. The second point about biological roles is that they are not especially concerned with the basic biological needs such as food and air which are essential for human survival. It might certainly be claimed that sexual satisfaction is a fairly basic human need and that reproduction is essential for the survival of the human race. At the same time it is true that the need for food and air is more basic than the need for sexual satisfaction and that it is necessary to distinguish between the survival of individual people and the survival of the human species. All roles including but not especially biological roles require the satisfactory functioning of the biological mechanism of the body and the absence of major disease. Perhaps it is necessary to modify that statement so that it is clear that it is concerned with all roles except the roles of patient and invalid which require the presence or alleged presence of disease. Finally it should be said that although biological roles are ascribed roles they do give us areas of choice despite the fact that one does not choose one's sex or one's age or one's race. Sexual, racial and chronological features can all either be accentuated or disguised. One can either accept one's race and its relationship with other races or can rebel against these aspects of one's life. It is possible to talk about a person's attitudes to his age, his race and his sex and his interpretation of his biological roles will display these attitudes.

Sex change operations despite all their complications do offer people many if not all of the social, psychological and even physical satisfaction of the opposite sex for the sacrifice of fertility. Since in addition to the loss of fertility, sex change operations cannot alter a person's basic skeletal structure, they produce in a sense simply an extreme form of biological disguise or rather perhaps, genetic sexual neutrality, but at the same time we must say that they provide the most extreme form of choice available in the field of biological roles. Despite the fact that they are often background roles biological roles cannot often be ignored when one is trying to understand someone's actions and behaviour.

#### Section 5 - Miscellaneous Points

It may be appropriate to end this chapter with a consideration of four miscellaneous points, two of which arise in the book 'Role' edited by Prof. J A Jackson. One of the papers in the book is entitled 'The Man and the Mask: A Discussion of Role Theory'. A footnote to the title explains inter alia that the 'article is an edited version of a discussion held between Bryan Heading (sociology), Martin Hollis (philosophy) and Malcolm Bradbury (literary criticism) at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England'. At one stage in the discussion (p 59) Mr Hollis replies to a point made by Mr Heading by saying

"But you have already agreed (or at least did not dispute it) that role-analysis explains only what a man is required by his roles to do. If you agree also that some chess moves are neither required nor forbidden by the role of chess master (and you can hardly deny it), then role-analysis does not explain why he plays them. Yet rational moves have rational explanations. The master explains by analysing the position why he played that particular move; the role theorist explains



by analysing the role why the master was in general playing to win. The sociological explanation is of the 'general-law' variety and does not explain the particular move; the rational explanation is not of the general variety and does explain the move. (That is why I prefer rational innovation. Irrational behaviour may well fit your model.)"

It should be obvious that role analysis explains more than what a man is required by his roles to do. What a man is allowed by his roles to do is also explained by role analysis and so is what he is encouraged to do and discouraged from doing by his roles. Precisely how a particular man responds to particular role pressures at a particular time cannot be explained by role theory but equally what that man does cannot be explained without reference to these pressures. It may be that it is not very sensible to talk about role pressures which encourage or discourage chess players to do or from doing certain things but chess playing does not enable us to see the complexities of role theory. Hollis sentence which begins 'If you agree also that ..... ' is hardly justified since Heading has just said (Jackson p 59) 'Because the roles of chess ..... only permit certain types of move'. At the end of the comments by Hollis quoted above we came across mistaken ideas that role theory is more or less irrelevant to the explanation of particular actions in the sense of e.g. moves in a chess game and is relevant only to the explanation of the general trends in action such as e.g. the general strategy of a game of chess. Once again the chess playing example is of limited value if one wants to see the complexities of role theory. But in general we can say that although role theory can never provide a total explanation of a particular action, however a particular action is defined, it can always provide a vital and important part of the explanation. What a man does in a particular situation can be understood only if we take into account his perceptions of his role situation.

Probably chess playing does not show the point at its clearest because the roles involved are simple and very precisely defined. A consideration of the actions of any president of the USA might very well make matters a lot clearer than a consideration of the moves made by chess players.

Another paper in Jackson's book is entitled 'Role: A Redundant Concept in Sociology?' In that paper Dr Coulson argues that

The concept of role, with its reliance on a view of man as role conformer and of society as integrated role system is a distortion. It is time that these inadequacies were recognized and that the concept of role was abandoned by sociologists. Without it we are able to examine the relationships between the expectations which members of different groups hold of the incumbents of a particular social position in a more flexible and dynamic way, one in which the structure of relationships existing and developing between the different groups in turn structures the expectations, and their consequences for the behaviour of the position holder are understood as part of an interaction with the individual's own learned expectations. The process is thus a dialectical one and presupposes neither unified sets of expectations about people in different positions, nor a passive individual adaptation to such sets of expectations.

It is perhaps somewhat strange to find a sociologist holding these views. The man in the street or in the Aristotelian Society might be forgiven for holding them if he had not paid much attention to role theory as many people in these places unfortunately have not paid much attention to it. But the position of sociologists is in theory at any rate different from that of these people. The main point to be made against Coulson is that role theory does not involve or rely on 'a view of man as role conformer and of society, as integrated role system'. Rebels, innovators and social change are all recognised and taken account of in role theory. Roles are not changeless and everlasting. They appear, change and disappear. One of the aims of the French revolutionaries was the abolition of the role of king of France and even if they did not achieve any of their

other aims at least they achieved that one. And so philosophers have been able to deal with the puzzles involved in the proposition 'The present King of France is bald' since the revolution. Similarly the Russian revolutionaries achieved the abolition of the role of tsar of Russia even if they achieved nothing else. Roles are seldom as obvious as when they are being rebelled against. Once I heard a prisoner being asked to address a prison official as 'sir' to which he replied 'I have never called anyone 'sir' since I came to prison and, I don't intend to start now'. His very defiance seemed to emphasise the strength of the conventions of his unfortunate role. One might guess that at the end of his long sentence that prisoner will be calling prison officials 'sir' and that in due course prisoners will not be expected to call prison officials 'sir'. Some roles are not easily changed but there are few roles that do not change in the course of time.

Role theory is neutral between functionalist and conflict views of society. And instead of providing us with a refutation of role theory Coulson has given us, quite unwittingly, a good account of some of its more important features. In the passage quoted above it is necessary to delete the first two sentences for the reasons which have been given. If the first two words of the third sentence are then replaced by the phrase 'with the help of role theory' and the word 'more' is deleted we have an excellent and worthwhile little contribution to role theory which runs as follows :-

'With the help of role theory we are able to examine the relationships between the expectations which members of different groups hold of the incumbents of a particular social position in a flexible and dynamic way, one in which the structure of relationships existing and developing between the different groups in turn structures the expectations, and their consequences for the behaviour of the position holder are understood as part of an interaction with the individual's own learned expectations. The process is



thus a dialectical one and presupposes neither unified sets of expectations about people in different positions, nor a passive individual adaptation to such sets of expectations.

There is an objection to role theory and to roles which is, I suppose, marxist and can, I suppose, be found in the relevant literature. But since I do not seem to have read that literature I am extremely grateful to Mr John Barker for bringing it to my attention especially since the conditions in which he found himself at the time may not have seemed to him to have been conducive to academic discussion. The objection dismisses roles as simply an unfortunate result of the division of labour which some people may regard as a totally bad thing. The objection is however completely misconceived. Let us imagine a simple agrarian community in which the division of labour is completely unknown. In that community no one is required to engage in any type of activity as opposed to any other type and no one is forbidden to engage in any type of activity. Everyone is free to perform surgical operations on everyone else and no one is told that he must not write epic poetry or engage in reproduction. Such a society would exhibit role behaviour as much as any other type of society because in it one would inevitably find a distinction between people and types of activity. The same activity or tasks would be carried out by different people just as the same thing would be said by different people. Even if everyone engaged in the same type of activity at the same time there would still be a distinction drawn between people engaged in one type of activity and people engaged in another type of activity. The language of the society would mark these distinctions. In other words the society would be a society in which roles would be found despite the absence of any division of labour. Biological roles might be particularly obvious in such a society. The very young and

very old would be likely to engage in different types of activity and there might even be certain differences between the activities of the sexes. In such a society one would distinguish between John acting as a surgeon and John acting as an epic poet and between John as a young child behaving in the way that young children behave and John as an old man behaving in the way that old men behave.

A common but simply silly type of criticism of role theory is given by Mr Douglas Holly in his book 'Society Schools and Humanity' where he writes (p 56)

'Role theory persists in seeing the individual as a bundle of people's perceptions - your role is determined by the way other people see you. Society has a pretty firm lockhold on the individual in the positivist perspective. Yet if one remembers that individuals vary in psychological constitution over an almost infinite range of dimensions and that a person's psyche, like the society which helps to form it, is in a continuous state of change, it comes as no surprise to find that actual people (as opposed to 'role-incumbents') are constantly initiating, assisting or resisting change. Change is at least as much a part of the human potential as is inertia, though it is inertia which positivist social science stresses with constructs like 'social role' and 'personality type'.

A person's role performance is a function of his role style and personal characteristics as well as of the relevant role pressures exerted on him by other people in his own and adjacent roles. Almost all roles are in a continuous state of change. In the second sentence of the next paragraph Holly neatly contradicts himself by writing 'No one can initiate change unless his social position allows him to do so'. Social position is largely if not entirely a matter of roles. Extreme contradictions of extreme positions do not however clarify matters and instead of Holly's remark about social change it would be more reasonable to say that the amount of change anyone can

initiate is generally a function of his social position.

We have tried in this chapter to see something of the complexity of roles and to challenge the common view that roles are narrow, restricting and rather tedious aspects of life which are at most of marginal importance when one is trying to explain human action. A great deal remains to be said especially in the next chapter and in chapter six but we have at least tried to carry out some of the preliminary work required for our important task.



## Chapter II

### ROLES AND MORALITY

#### Section 1 - Rights and Duties

Roles are central to morality and the study of roles is central to the study of morality. These points are not perhaps very well appreciated at the present time and so in this chapter we must try to argue the case for them. But before we embark on our main task we must return to the business of defining the concept of a role which concerned us in the first section of the last chapter. It is appropriate to continue with that matter in this chapter because moral notions have an important part to play in the definition of the concept of a role. And so we can say that a role can be defined by stating the rights and duties of those who fill it because they are as it were the rules of the game. The role of postman for example can be explained by saying that postmen are required to collect and distribute mail. There are rights as well as duties involved here since it is illegal for people other than postmen to handle mail in transit and to collect the contents of letter boxes etc. The rights and duties aspect of roles certainly cannot by itself explain role behaviour but it forms a background to such behaviour which cannot be properly understood without it. Terms of employment, role description and role specification usually give the rights and duties aspect of roles and that aspect is the official and legal or quasi legal view of roles although if we wish to understand actual role behaviour we must take into account conventions which may differ sometimes radically, from the official view. But an appreciation of why and in what ways

role conventions differ from the appropriate role descriptions will tell us a lot about roles. Sometimes official descriptions of a role simply lag behind events and if they are not revised frequently they simply give an out-of-date picture of the relevant role. At other times an official description of a role may be an attempt to hide or to distort what actually goes on. A university registrar once told me that officially, according to the terms of his appointment, his job was to give legal and financial advice to the university council. In fact he very rarely if ever did that. What he actually did could be described in various ways such as 'he is responsible to the council for the efficient control of the administrative affairs of the university'. Alternatively it could be said and indeed was said that he ran the university or imagined he ran the university or tried to run the university. And these things were said sometimes as expressions of envy or pity or simply of impotent academic rage and at other times as comparatively straightforward descriptions of what was in fact happening. Often official statements of role rights and duties are simply ignored to the considerable satisfaction of all concerned but in time of dispute or difficulty they can assume considerable importance. In a certain rather sad Scottish case a headmaster who had by all accounts run his school in a manner which met with the complete approval of masters, boys, parents and old boys clashed with his board of governors on largely non educational matters and they dismissed him from his post. When he tried to take legal action against them he lost his case and the judge pointed out that legally he was simply the servant of the board of governors. Doubtless headmasters seldom act like servants and they are not normally expected to but that is what they legally are and they forget it at their peril in times of dispute or difficulty.

A general consideration of what rights and duties are might be

useful at this point. One can perhaps see what they are if one considers the simple statements 'I have a right to do x' and 'I have a duty or an obligation to do x'. Saying that I have a right to do x means that I am justified in doing x and that I can claim support for doing x and for defeating attempts to prevent me doing x. Generally such support will come from some legal or quasi legal authority and from those who uphold it. If I am asked what my justification for my rights <sup>is</sup> or how I know that I have a right I can usually point to some legal or similar code which gives me the right. Sometimes rights are not explicitly stated in any code but are implied by social convention. Thus an orchestral conductor has a right to be fairly insulting about his players performance and to impose his interpretations upon them although the right may not be stated in the official definition of his job which might very well refer only to drawing up programmes and rehearsing and conducting the orchestra. But rights which are based only on conventions are much more easily challenged and much less easily defended than those which are explicitly formulated. A member of the orchestra could ask the conductor to criticise politely and in turn he might be told that conductors are not normally polite and that it would be impossible to reach the desired standard of performance without frankness and even rudeness on the conductor's part. It is difficult to be precise about a conductor's right to be rude during rehearsal. A policeman's right to enter and search private property however is a very different matter since it is comparatively well formulated. Saying that I have a duty or obligation to do x means not only that I am justified in doing x and that I can claim support for doing x and for defeating attempts to prevent me doing x but also that I must do x whether I want to or not. I may choose not to exercise my rights but I cannot avoid my duties because others are justified in asking me to perform



them and in invoking sanctions if I refuse. Indeed one can say that every right implies a duty and every duty implies a right. Every right implies the duty of others to respect that right and every duty implies the right of some others to demand the performance of that duty. It follows from this that there is likely to be a greater amount of pleasure or satisfaction associated with the exercise of rights than with the performance of duties. If one finds the exercise of a right distasteful one may avoid it but one has to perform distasteful duties. There is no need to elaborate this point in an extreme nineteenth century way which might involve talking about the stern voice of duty. Some duties may be unpleasant but others such as some social duties may be extremely pleasant and enjoyable. One should note that the relationship between rights and duties is not symmetrical although every right implies a duty and every duty implies a right it is also the case that every duty implies another duty but it is not the case that every right implies another right. Every duty implies the duty of others to respect that duty. There are two possible ways in which others are entitled to be interested in my duties. They are entitled to demand their performance and they are also required to see that I am not frustrated in my attempts to carry them out. The duties of policemen illustrate that point well since some people frequently ask the police to carry out their duties and others frequently try to prevent them doing the same thing. The police are entitled to ask the public not to prevent them carrying out their duties and indeed even to help them to carry them out and they are also under obligation to perform them on demand.

Various philosophers have considered that the psychological aspect of rights and duties is important so it is perhaps a good idea to give it some consideration. Professor Hart remarks in his article on Legal and Moral Obligations that 'The statement that a thief has a legal

obligation not to - is not a psychological statement about him. He may have no fear at all of the threatened evil and yet his obligation remains'. That view is obviously correct. Obligations are distinct from feelings in a number of ways. One may quite easily feel emotionally detached from one's obligations and be neither enthusiastic nor unenthusiastic about them. Equally one may be either ecstatic about them or nauseated by them but either way their status as obligations remains unchanged. The fact that it is easier to fulfill these obligations one likes than those one dislikes is quite irrelevant. That point is often made but it is perhaps not quite so common to suggest that the emotions cannot be commanded and so we cannot have an obligation to have any particular emotion in any particular situation or to feel in any particular way about anything. One can be asked to control one's feelings or at least to control the expression of them but that is quite different from being asked to have certain emotions in a certain context. If the well known injunctions to love one's neighbour as oneself and to love one's enemies mean that one ought to have feelings of love towards neighbours and enemies as well as behaving in certain ways towards them then the injunctions are absurd because they are impossible to fulfill. Feelings cannot be produced at will. If one altered the injunctions to read 'Treat your enemies as if you loved them' the situation would be bad enough for it might be claimed that even that style of injunction and obligation was impossible to fulfill. In this field the most emotional injunction and obligation possible is the Kantian one to respect persons. It is possible to respect someone even if one dislikes him though perhaps one should really say that it is just possible. Respect is an attitude rather than a feeling or an emotion. In addition it is perhaps worth mentioning the distinctions between the subjective ought and the objective ought which is noted by Frankena

in his paper on 'Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy' and also by many others. One has a subjective obligation if one feels one ought to do something and an objective obligation if in fact one ought to something. Similarly there can be subjective and objective rights. The first point to notice here is that feeling one ought to do something is a matter of belief and not of emotion. Such a feeling is not a feeling in the sense of an emotion such as anger. An accurate paraphrase of 'he feels he ought to do something' is 'he thinks he ought to do something' and this shows that we are dealing with credal and not an emotional matter. Subjective obligations may or may not correspond to objective obligations. A man may think that he ought to do x when in fact he ought or when in fact either he ought not or need not. If he ought to do so then his belief that he ought is true but if he either ought not or need not do so then his belief is false and he is suffering from a delusion. And a similar account can be given of subjective and objective rights.

Now we must return from a consideration of general philosophical points to roles and notice that as we said at the beginning of this section conventions are normally more important than the legal or quasi legal codes which may govern roles from the official point of view and that consequently it can in fact be extremely difficult to separate subjective rights and duties from objective rights and duties. The roles of headmaster and orchestral conductor have already been mentioned and they are both useful at present. There is a sense in which official descriptions of roles give the objective rights and duties and conventions give what are not much better than subjective rights and duties. Yet it is often both impossible and undesirable to give more importance to official descriptions than to conventions. Take the case of the conductor. If he does not take advantage of the convention of making



very frank criticisms of his players to the point of rudeness then he is unlikely to achieve a satisfactory standard of performance and interpretation although he may strictly speaking have absolutely no official backing for his frankness. Similarly headmasters cannot run their establishments in the manner in which they are expected to run them if they normally think of themselves as servants. Indeed they would displease their governing bodies whose servants they officially are if they behaved in a servile or extremely cautious manner. Yet the Scottish case mentioned above remains as a warning to them of the danger of totally forgetting the official position. In any event neither rights and duties nor conventions can give a complete guide to every role situation partly because each role occupant is likely to encounter many unique and novel situations and also because any role is likely to require a judicious breaking of conventions and ignoring of official rights and duties from time to time. Such action may be very risky because it leaves the role performer open to severe criticism if it fails but very often only a very mundane and uninspired role performance can be achieved without it and the role performer may be reasonably criticised for being conventional and unimaginative if he does not take risks.

## Section 2 - Roles and Moral Agents

Roles are essential to morality because they give us specific obligations to specific people and they also give us very specific and often very agonising moral problems. General moral principles leave us, as it were, in mid air with moral obligations to the whole human race. The moral life is only possible if we come down to earth and have a reasonable number of obligations to a reasonable number of

people and if we give priority to these obligations over our general obligations to the whole human race. Let us suppose that we start forming our moral principles with what is so appealing in our salad days, namely utilitarianism. Soon increasing philosophical knowledge and sophistication makes us give priority to negative over positive utilitarianism and makes us limit even negative utilitarianism by first of all respect for persons and secondly a prima facie obligation to honour promises and contracts of all kinds. Someone who was only a moral agent would almost certainly be aware of much more suffering and distress than he could possibly relieve and that would still be true even if he limited his attention to distress he knew of by acquaintance rather than by description. Such a limitation of attention would in any event be hard to justify on moral grounds. Roles solve this problem. My duties to my own children are greater than my duties to anyone else's children, although if I am a teacher or a paediatrician or a social worker specialising in work with children, I may have very considerable duties to other peoples children. Certainly, although individuals are never in fact simply moral agents, they are always moral agents as well as parents, prostitutes, executioners and landscape gardeners. And in situations of great emergency one has a duty as a moral agent to try to save human life even if the individual whose life is in danger does not enter into any of one's other role relationships. The chances of the life actually being saved will probably be increased if as well as being a moral agent one is a doctor. Sometimes the relevant situations can be horribly complicated. If one's children are playing with strangers in the jungle in Vietnam when a passing American bomber sends an incendiary bomb down amongst them and one runs out of one's hut to save life, is one a moral agent amongst charred moral agents, or is one a father amongst one's children

and some strangers? One is in fact both and because of that one endures agony both when the incident actually takes place and whenever one remembers it. A doctor to whom all the injured were strangers would probably give priority either to those who were most seriously injured or to the most seriously injured of those who had a reasonable chance of survival after treatment. And a non medical person would act in very much the same way, although at most he could offer first aid and although his ability to judge chances of survival would probably not be very great. The father of one or more of the injured could quite justifiably give priority to his child over someone who was less seriously injured or over someone who was as seriously injured as his child. If his child were the most seriously injured and had even in the eyes of the medically completely untrained, no chance of survival, then the father would not be justified in giving this child more than brief comfort. Only if his child were as seriously injured as another child and had a reasonable chance of survival would the father be justified in discriminating in favour of his child just because he was his child.

The example that has just been discussed runs counter to a certain extent to the main point that roles are vital for morality. But it does that simply because it is concerned with exceptional circumstances. Possibly only during war is it at all common to be faced with large numbers of seriously injured people remote from adequate medical resources. Death comes swiftly in such circumstances and so that type of situation is quite different from the Indian situation in which millions starve to death comparatively slowly, remote from the food surplus of USA and western Europe. Normally one is comparatively ignorant of people outside one's role relationships and one is comparatively unable to help them. Donations to charity are often an attempt to relieve the feelings of slight moral discomfort that



this inevitable situation tends to produce. Within the field of role relationships there are tremendous variations in knowledge and ability to help. Parents know a great deal about, and can do a great deal for their sons and daughters during their childhood, but not during their adulthood. One cannot do very much to help matters if one's secretary is almost always pregnant unless one is the direct cause of the situation. And the prime minister of India cannot do very much about the millions of starving Indian subjects. But generally speaking, one can do more for one's own secretary than for someone else's and the prime minister of India can do more for starving Indians than for starving Britons. A remark of Hume's is strangely analogous to what we want to say here. In the Treatise of Human Nature Book III, Part III, Section I, he says "We sympathise more with persons contiguous to us than with persons remote from us,, with our acquaintance than with strangers - but notwithstanding this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in China as in England." Using that remark as the basis of a very loose analogy, we may say that our primary duties and obligations are concerned with people with whom we are socially involved through our role relationships. And at the same time, we are often uncomfortably aware of a vast field of potential secondary duties concerning all those with whom we are in no way socially involved. Sometimes we make gestures such as donations to Oxfam towards that field of secondary duties.

At the beginning of this section, we mentioned the very specific and often very agonising moral problems which roles give us. It is now time to see what precisely these problems are. They arise from intra and inter-role conflict. The subject of inter role conflict draws our attention to the extremely important fact that individuals occupy many roles and indeed many roles at the same time. Beside one

in the agony of the rush hour tube is someone who is not only a passenger attempting to defraud London Transport but who is also a loving father, an unfaithful husband, a Fabian, a member of the Patients' Association and an expert in industrial espionage employed by an organisation concerned with what is somewhat euphemistically called industrial security. And at any moment his various roles may start interacting in a very complicated way. If the sudden appearance of a ticket inspector leads to his conviction and his taking up residence in Wormwood Scrubs his wife, children, employers, as well as the Assistant Governor in charge of security and the Principal Medical Officer may all find their lives strangely and suddenly changed. Another example will help to illustrate the problem. One afternoon on an English red brick campus a lecturer in English burst into tears while she was taking a seminar. Before the seminar she had been to visit her seriously ill professor husband in the teaching hospital beside the university. A well meaning ward sister had said to her "your father is slightly better today Mrs X". The role of tutor which would normally be Mrs X's foreground role during a seminar was suddenly pushed into the background by the role of wife. If someone does not occupy many roles, but is trapped in one as a prisoner of a chronic patient, he is likely to suffer in a variety of ways by becoming, as it were, a personification of that role. A reasonable number of different roles is essential for a human existence. But now we must return to intra and inter role conflict. Professor R Darendorf in his essay 'Homo Sociologicus' mentions conflict within roles and writes "One thinks of the university professor torn between the demands of research, teaching and administration". There are different ways of solving such a conflict. One can either give priority to one activity and neglect the others or one can struggle endlessly to give adequate attention

to all of them. The agonising nature of a conflict of that type arises from the fact that it is impossible to give adequate attention to all the activities and giving priority to one of them leads inevitably to a neglect of duty in relation to the other activities of which one is likely to be made aware. Sometimes of course, one may manage to sacrifice some of one's activities with impunity. Once I studied under a professor whose lack of interest in his subject and his students was quite exceptional, but when I became a university administrator, I heard him praised on all sides for his administrative ability. Despite such examples Darendorf's point is a sound one. In the field of politics one can think of the conflict between gaining and retaining power on the one hand and using it to achieve desirable ends on the other. For many politicians ends and means become hopelessly confused and gaining and retaining power become ends in themselves. Even an honest and unconfused politician may find that many really important matters have to be avoided for quite some time before an election.

Mothers-in-law and step fathers show us the problems of inter-role conflict. A paragon of virtue would find it difficult if he or she tried to be either a mother-in-law or a step father. Certain types of personality may very well exacerbate these difficulties, but they cannot cause them because the difficulties are inherent in the role situation. A girl's mother and her husband are likely to find it difficult to share her. Employers and employees are unlikely ever to live in perfect peace because employers aspire to a situation in which labour costs nothing and employees aspire to a situation in which they are paid vast sums for doing nothing, or at least, nothing they dislike. These examples are concerned with one type of inter role conflict, viz inevitable conflict between related roles which leads to



conflict between individuals in these roles whatever their personal characteristics may be. The other type of inter role conflict concerns the conflict an individual experiences between the demands made on him by two or more roles which he occupies simultaneously. The casualty surgeon who finds that the desperate case in front of him is his wife or his son experiences a dramatic form of role conflict. As a husband or a father his response to the situation is a very emotional and involved one, but as a casualty surgeon his response is very technical and uninvolved one. Normally in such situations another casualty surgeon is available to deal with the case but if no one else is available the father or husband and surgeon is likely to experience really unbearable conflict between the demands of his roles. Sometimes it is quite easy to avoid role conflict by appropriate action and so medical students are warned not to make friends of their patients or patients of their friends. And they are also warned not to question the advice of doctors who treat them when they are themselves patients. Similarly, judges avoid cases in which they have an interest. In a paper entitled 'Beliefs and Roles' delivered to the Aristotlian Society in 1966, Mr Gerald A Cohen gives an example of inter role conflict when he mentions the case of an American professor who said to his son on the subject of cheating in a particular examination "As your father I must consider your welfare, and I think you ought to cheat, but as a member of the Committee of Discipline, I think you should respect the rules". Mr Cohen wants to defend the view that the professor should have committed himself not as a father or as a professor, but as a man. Presumably in this context committing oneself as a man is the same as committing oneself as a moral agent. But neither the professor or his son can be simply a moral agent and if one tries to speak to the other as a moral agent addressing another moral agent, what is said

will have little bearing on the situation in which one person who is a moral agent, a professor, a father and a member of the Committee on Discipline addresses another who is a student and his son. Mr Cohen does not do justice to the complexity of his own example. We hear what the father says and what the member of the committee says, but not what the professor says. Even in America, it is not unreasonable to expect that a professor might wish to encourage a genuine as opposed to a bogus academic performance and that he might have some concern for the standards of academic competition and of degrees. Certainly only a distinctly odd professor or a distinctly odd father would advise his son to cheat in an examination, and more peculiar still, base his advice on a consideration of the boy's welfare. If the person concerned is both a father and a professor, the advice is really totally unbelievable. The moral agent could reasonably expect to receive as much support from the father and the professor as from the member of the Committee on Discipline.

Moral appraisal cannot avoid roles. If one is evaluating an action we must take account of the role situation and roles themselves require moral evaluation. Probably most of us assume that roles can easily be defied. It is difficult to be certain about this since the matter is not much discussed. At the Nuremburg trials for instance one was probably meant to believe that the eloquent prosecutors would have been moral heroes and martyrs if they had been in the positions in the Nazi regime that the defendants had occupied. Scepticism about this seems to me to be entirely justified. Very few of us are capable of being heroes and martyrs. Many roles can defeat all but a very few exceptional and exceptionally well placed individuals. In bureaucracies almost everyone is to a greater or lesser extent servile and sycophantic towards superiors and at times nasty towards subordinates. The nursing



sister who reduces student nurses to tears will grovel to consultants. And she is simply an extreme example of a very common phenomenon. Only those who will not suffer to any great extent from resignation or dismissal or who for some special reason cannot be dismissed can afford to be outspoken with their superiors in a bureaucracy. A middle aged man who supports a wife and family and who has virtually no employment prospects outside his organisation will inevitably do almost anything he is told to do by his superiors. In barbaric situations, those who disobey are simply killed. Pure moral agents would doubtless think that the words from one of Plato's dialogues "it is better to suffer wrong than to do it" are the final answer to the whole question and they would calmly endure dismissal, poverty or even death. But pure moral agents do not support wives and families and are not deeply affected by social stigma and disgrace. Socrates was an exceptional man.

It is often more reasonable to condemn certain roles and certain individuals for taking on certain roles than to condemn certain actions in certain role situations. Let us take the case of the role of executioner. One of the more sordid aspects of its presence in Britain was evidently the steady and totally excessive stream of uninvited applicants for the post that it attracted. Its abolition was from the moral point of view totally commendable. In a society of saints it would doubtless be impossible to fill that role, but Britain is not such a society. One might argue that sadistic individuals will always find ways of being sadistic despite the absence of officially approved sadistic roles, but there is a vast difference between encouraging certain types of behaviour and accepting the unfortunate fact that they cannot be prevented. The case of the executioner is extreme and dramatic. In less extreme and dramatic cases it is desirable to work for role reform rather than abolition. Judges



in Britain are no longer required to pass death sentences and so an undesirable duty has been removed from their role. Those who wish to stop corporal punishment in schools are trying to improve the teacher's role. It has been suggested that the practice of tattooing would be made completely safe if a register of adequately qualified tattooists were established. Middle class prejudice against this colourful piece of working class culture is said to stand in the way of this desirable role reform. When one turns to the question of an individual's responsibility for occupying his roles one has to distinguish between achieved and ascribed roles. One does not choose to be a son, but one does choose to be a father. In the first case one is dealing with an ascribed role and in the second with an achieved role. Generally speaking one is responsible for occupying one's achieved roles. At times of choosing roles one's freedom of choice may be very limited and one may make mistakes. If one is seeking employment, clearly one can apply with any hope of success for only a small percentage of the types of employment that are actually open to applicants. One is bound to be too old for some jobs, and too young for others, and too poorly qualified for some and too well qualified for others and so on. Another complication with roles is that one cannot really know what they are like until one has occupied them. A lot of information about roles is not easily available to people other than their occupants. And even if one has very extensive information about a role and knows many people in it, there is still an important sense in which it is true to say that one does not know what it is like to occupy a role unless one has actually done so. Single people do not know what it is like to be married and married people do not know what it is like to remain single beyond the point at which they got married. Those who have never been clergymen do not know what it is like to be

clergymen and so on. If one does decide that one has made a mistake in entering a certain role one's freedom to leave it may be very limited. Some people remain married to each other for the sake of their children. And leaving a certain role may not be a matter of returning to the state one was in before one entered it. King Edward VIII could not become the Prince of Wales again when he abdicated. A divorced person is very different from someone who has never married. In the light of what we have said in this paragraph it should be clear that we should hesitate for a long time and consider carefully before one blames someone for occupying a certain role, but blame may sometimes be appropriate.

Ascribed roles present special problems. Conscripts, prisoners and those who are required by law to attend school may have certain grievances. Forcing someone to occupy a certain role can be a very serious step. In the case of compulsory education, it is done for the good of the individuals concerned and in the case of imprisonment and of compulsory military service, it is said to be done for the good of the community, at the expense of those who are imprisoned or enlisted. Making provision for conscientious objection to compulsory military service is a sign of moral doubts on the part of those who decide in favour of imposing a role on many people. In the case of compulsory education, there is not normally any provision for total conscientious objection even on the part of the parent, let alone on the part of the pupils themselves. The frequent raising of the school leaving age increases the moral problems in this area. It is not sufficient to allow parents to withdraw their children from religious instructions or sex instructions or both. The possibility of education must be made available to all irrespective of parental views on the matter, but the possibility of rejecting education must also be available,

at least to the adolescent. Even if society tries to exclude that possibility, it will in fact be taken by many people. Perhaps one has to meet a young adult illiterate who says he has not the slightest interest in learning to read and write before one can fully appreciate the immorality of forcing education on people. Most young adult illiterates are in fact very keen to become literate, but the exception who opened my eyes was puzzled by the suggestion that he might want to learn to read and write and he explained that he was just like his illiterate parents who coped with life perfectly adequately. At that point a rather silly attempt to point out the advantages of literacy over illiteracy was given up. Just as conscientious objectors are required to engage in one of a list of approved activities, it might be appropriate to require those who wish to opt out of compulsory education to engage in suitable non educational activities in order to discourage excessive laziness. It is difficult to see what one can do with the role of prisoner other than abolish it or at least make it a part time role eg. a weekend role but one might suggest that prisoners should be allowed to form a trade union. Such an organisation would be able to engage in interesting, if not exactly fruitful negotiations with similar organisations such as the Prison Officers' Association. And participation in trade union activity in custody would be a useful preparation for similar activity after release.

Roles show up possible weaknesses in absolute moral imperatives and categorical imperatives such as the rule that deliberate killing of human beings by other human beings is always wrong. Yet the common roles of combatant, executioner, armed policeman, armed prison guard and armed counter espionage agent do challenge that rule. Absolutists can and do object to these roles, i.e., they refuse to allow that killing ceases to be immoral just because it is done by a combatant



or an executioner in the course of his duty. They call soldiers murderers and refer to executioners as legalised murderers. Whether or not they are right in doing this is a matter of moral judgment. But it is important to note that, if an act which is normally regarded as highly immoral, e.g., killing, is regarded as either amoral or moral when it is carried out by the occupants of certain roles in the course of their duty, it is at least possible to say that there is not necessarily any tendency for the influence of these roles to cause the act to be regarded as either moral or amoral when it is carried out outside the limits of these roles. Even during a war which involves endless carnage, murder may still be severely condemned and a soldier home on leave from extremely fierce fighting could not expect any special sympathy if he committed murder. And people who as soldiers come to regard death as a commonplace on the battlefield may regard murder with horror. One might say that this example illustrates the strength of roles and their ability to contain actions within certain limits.

It is commonly said that roles depersonalize people and turn them into automata which treat other people as automata. One frequently hears for instance, complaints about the inhuman and insensitive behaviour of bureaucrats. There are however, considerable advantages in the impersonal aspects of certain roles and these have been well expressed by Professor Charles Davis in his book 'A Question of Conscience' where he makes the following remarks (page 201-2) "The limited scope of every organisation with the impersonal character this gives it, should be seen as the liberation of the individual from imposed and preformed relationships. Many prefer to get medical attention without extending the relationship with the doctor to friendship, unless they deliberately choose to do so .....

it is a restriction upon one's liberty and privacy to be unable to buy goods without entering into a discussion with the shopkeeper about the details of one's personal life. The anonymity of the city and the general possibility of limited the numerous necessary relationships of social existence to their particular purpose leave men free to shape their own lives and commit themselves as persons by a truly free decision.....

A surgeon or lawyer or administrator who limits his relationship to his clients to what professionally concerns him is respecting and not decrying their integrity as persons. Only if he forgets that his relationship with them is limited, and does not embrace their total reality as persons will he be guilty of treating them as mere objects for his professional skill". Davis deserves great credit for drawing our attention to the benefits of certain often unpopular features of roles. But at the same time it is necessary to emphasize that the most personal aspects of our lives are to be found within the framework of roles. And so Dahendorf is quite mistaken and confused when at the end of his excellent essay 'Homo Sociologus' he writes "However we turn and twist homo sociologus he will never be the particular person who is our friend, colleague, father or brother. Homo sociologus can neither love nor hate, laugh nor cry". Certainly a particular individual's interpretation of a role contains elements that are not covered by a general description of the role. But when one talks of friends, colleagues, fathers and brothers one is talking of roles and role relationships. And however intimate or eccentric one's own versions of these relationships may become they will still be influenced by at least some of the general features of the relevant roles. The remark about loving, hating, laughing and crying is very strange. When a senior prison governor told assistant governors in training

that at times their work would reduce them to tears he did not imagine that he was dealing with a particularly lachrymose set of individuals. Roles can most certainly make us love, hate, laugh and cry.

### Section 3 - The role of moral agent

The philosophical literature on roles is somewhat limited but one of the better papers on the subject is Prof. B Mayo's essay on The Moral Agent in which he writes (Royal Insitute of Philosophy Lectures Vol. 1 p 62) "There is no reason why someone who says 'Speaking not as a father, or a government employee, but from the moral point of view....' should not be assuming a role, though certainly a very special and important one.' Indeed there is no reason and we can illumine matters by asking if the role is ascribed or achieved and by comparing the chronological aspects with the chronological aspects of sexual roles. The comparison may be strange but it may also be illuminating. Very interestingly the role of moral agent is both achieved and ascribed. After a certain age people are not allowed to escape their moral responsibilities and they are if necessary very strongly reminded that they are moral agents whether they like it or not. At the same time most people want sooner or later to be moral agents and to take moral decisions. It is perhaps difficult to think of another role which is both ascribed to almost everyone and achieved by almost everyone in exactly the same sort of way as the role of moral agent. But sex roles provide a useful comparison to a certain extent. After a certain stage boys are likely to find that people treat them like men and expect them to behave like men or in other words that the role of adult male is ascribed to them. Equally however most boys want to become men or in



other words to achieve the role of adult male. When conscription is in operation someone who wants to join the army or in other words to achieve the role of soldier will find that it is ascribed to him by the mechanisms of conscription. Such a person may decide to make it clear that he is not an unwilling conscript by volunteering before his conscription date or by signing on for a period which is longer than the period of conscription. The sexual and military examples are not exactly the same as the case of the moral agent. Pacifism, homosexuality and transexuality all provide ways of avoiding to a greater or lesser extent the roles of soldier and heterosexual adult. There are no similar ways of avoiding the role of moral agent. We do not say that Hitler was not a moral agent but rather that he was highly immoral or in other words a very poor moral agent. Possibly we say that those who are extremely mentally deficient or are psychotic are not capable of being moral agents. These cases are however cases concerned with the refusal to ascribe the role of moral agent to people and so are unlike pacifism, homosexuality and transexuality which are concerned with a refusal or inability to achieve the role of soldier or of heterosexual adult very often in circumstances in which at times extremely strong efforts are made to ascribe these roles to the people concerned. As far as the role of moral agent is concerned then we do not allow people to refuse to achieve it although at times we may refuse to ascribe it.

The chronological aspects of the role of moral agent are very like the chronological aspects of sexual roles. Just as they very young and the very old may be regarded as asexual so they may also be regarded as amoral. There may be some doubt about the case of old people whose sexual interests and abilities vary greatly and indeed whose moral capabilities may also vary greatly but there can be

comparatively little doubt about the case of young people. Just as children are not capable of adult sexual activity so they are not capable of acting as moral agents in the complete sense of the term. Moral agency like adult sexuality develops slowly. Since there is no moral equivalent of puberty it is never possible to be very precise about the age at which someone becomes a full moral agent and indeed one must always allow for moral development throughout a person's life. Legal and political matters have a moral element in them and so both the age of criminal responsibility and the age of political franchise inevitably influence peoples ideas about the age at which people become moral agents. We have already noted that the moral and sexual state of old people is complicated but as far as the completely senile are concerned it is reasonable to regard them as both asexual and amoral. We can say therefore that these are important parallels between the chronological aspects of sexual roles and the chronological aspects of the role of moral agent.

The soundness of Prof Mayo's point has been shown by the fact that the role of moral agent can be discussed and analysed in the same way as any other role. At the same time it is important to note the position of the role of moral agent as perhaps the only universal role which is potentially ascribed to everyone and achieved by everyone. One might say that certain chronological roles such as child and old person are ascribed to everyone who lives long enough to reach the relevant part of the human life cycle. Despite a certain amount of asexuality in the early and late stages of life one can say that the roles of child and old person are not really as universal as the role of moral agent since it is often most satisfactory to break the role of child into the roles of boy and girl and the roles of old person into the roles of old man and old woman. The true significance of the role of moral agent

lies in the fact that although it may not be the only universal role it is almost certainly the only universal adult role which is potentially ascribed to everyone and achieved by everyone. As soon as one has said that however it is necessary to emphasise that some of the greatest problems of the moral life arise out of the fact that the role of moral agent is inevitably involved with countless other roles. That point has already been discussed in section two.

#### Section 4 - Freedom and Equality

Freedom and equality are vast topics which do not directly concern us in this work. The only point that concerns us here is that roles are central to any discussion of these topics. Since it is usual to find that published discussions of freedom and equality make absolutely no reference to roles our point may be well worth making.

One's freedom is limited by one's roles amongst other things. Every role involves things that cannot be done and cannot be said by its occupants. It might seem at first sight that although in normal circumstances most people would probably rather not break the conventions of their roles yet any sensible person could easily and sensibly break these conventions. If we think that social conventions are just slight restraints on freedom we may think of situations such as that in which it is said an elderly Oxford professor held a party in his house one evening. Fairly late in the evening he went up to his wife and said, 'darling, I think it is time we went'. His startled wife had to remind him that he was the host and not a guest and that he was proposing to do something that in terms of social and role conventions a host cannot do. Clearly a certain amount of confusion would have been caused if the professor had carried out his plan but stranger things have happened at



Oxford parties and the poor man may after all have found his guests totally boring. When we think of role restraints as slight matters we laugh at the tale of the Victorian porters who could not run into the street after a thief because they did not have their hats on. Our laughter may give way to surprise when we hear that recently in London a man was unable to pursue a thief in his own house because he did not have his trousers on. But we are doubtless all convinced that in real emergencies we could all throw social and role conventions to the winds and eg run into public lavatories normally reserved for the opposite sex.

The hatless Victorian porters and the trouserless man in London may actually suggest that people can at times find it surprisingly difficult to break apparently trivial social conventions. The strength of role restrictions on freedom however comes out much more clearly in different examples such as incest and colleagues in distress. In our society the incest taboo is very strong and it means primarily that the role of parent excludes sexual relationships with one's offspring and the role of offspring excludes sexual relationships with one's parents. It has been suggested and indeed seems to be obvious that the incest taboo performs a very useful social function in directing young peoples sexual interests away from their parents and indeed away from their siblings and towards people outside their own family. Whatever its function or functions may be however our concern is with its strength in relation to the relevant roles. As far as is known, the incest taboo is not widely broken in our society and when it is broken strong feelings tend to be roused in many people. The strength of some of these feelings might raise suspicions that at times the desire to break the taboo may be quite widespread but at best that is a fairly wild guess. In any event the case of incest shows us very strong

limitations in one direction at any rate on the freedom of action of parents offsprings and sildings. These limitations may be totally desirable but they are certainly there and they are certainly very strong and almost inevitably more people must want to break them than actually do break them. Although it is a digression perhaps even in an academic discussion of role theory such as this we should note the futility of sending men to prison for incest. Very frequently such men tell very convincing tales of strong sexual approaches from their daughters. A girl's complicated emotional relationship with her father is unlikely to be helped by sending her father to prison. One's relationship with colleagues in distress shows the strength of role boundaries and limitations on one's freedom. Naturally unless one has a totally bizarre job one does not normally meet one's colleagues in a state of distress but it can happen from time to time. Role boundaries in this situation are clearest where at least part of one's job is concerned with welfare work. In such a job dealing with clients in distress is a comparatively routine matter which does not present any special problems. But dealing with colleagues in distress almost rightly and inevitably reduces one to a state of impotence because although on the one hand one knows that treating a distressed colleague as if he were a client will probably reduce his distress on the other hand one also knows that treating a colleague as a client is insulting to his status as a colleague and may create grave difficulties when he has recovered from his distress. One is likely to end up sharing one's sense of impotence with colleagues who are not in a state of distress by saying eg. in a university 'if he were a student it would be obvious what should be done but since he is a colleague one can do nothing' and similarly in a prison one is likely to say 'if he were a prisoner it would be obvious etc'.

There does not seem to be any justification for ignoring roles in

discussions of freedom but they normally are ignored. And so if one comes across a philosophical book with the title Essays on Freedom of Action one could reasonably expect that it would, because of the very meaning of the title, have to contain at least one essay on roles and the limits they impose on freedom of action. But in fact a recent book of that title edited by Dr Honderich does not contain any such essay and the whole topic appears to be entirely ignored in the book. Honderich's very brief introduction to the volume should be read very carefully because it reveals that in a very important and fundamental as opposed to a superficial and obvious sense Honderich like most other philosophers writing in English has simply never heard of sociology or of role theory. One cannot write and edit in the way that Honderich has written and edited in that book unless one is totally unaware that sociology and role theory are basic to an understanding of individual people and their actions and that they are at least as relevant to the understudy of individual people as neurophysiology and psychology which are mentioned in the book. One can certainly argue about the degree of relevance of sociology to the understanding of individuals. But only if one holds the simple minded and naive assumption that sociology is concerned with something called society and not with individual people can one ignore the matter in discussions of freedom and freedom of action. This point will concern us again both in Chapter VI and in the General Conclusion.

Roles are as important to the study of equality as they are to the study of freedom. As long as roles are unequal people are unequal. The inequality of roles is connected with the unequal distribution of wealth, power, land and property in most societies and with the class structure of most societies. Mercifully we do not have to go into such vast and complicated matters here because ancillary roles provide us



with a short cut. Some roles are ancillary to others and so in the relevant role situations those who occupy the ancillary roles are to a greater or lesser extent inferior to those who occupy the dominant roles. Nurses are for example inferior to doctors and secretaries are inferior to their bosses. Roles also create certain types of competition which lead to inequalities. There is competition within roles and also competition to get into some roles. Some nurses become matrons and some doctors become consultants. Since there is only one president of the USA at a time there is much competition amongst many people to become president. Those nurses who do not become matrons and those Americans who do not become president may be regarded as inferior to those who do.

It is sometimes asserted that all men are born equal. A study of roles shows us that in a very obvious sense in many societies the assertion is simply false. The role of 'offspring of x' has the social status of x. In other words from their earliest days children have the social status of their parents. The picture is complicated to a certain extent by children of unknown origin and parentage and by test tube babies who are likely to be with us sooner or later. The complication is fairly slight because whatever happens to such children they simply acquire the social status appropriate to their social situation. If they are adopted they acquire the social status of those who adopt them and if they are brought up in some kind of institution they acquire the social status of inmates of the institution. Utopians have often wanted to remove children from their parents at birth in order to achieve social equality. Mere removal from parents would not of course be enough. Children would have to be deprived of all knowledge of their parents in order to prevent them taking their status into utopian institutions for the young. Such utopian ideas involve cruelty to parents by depriving them of the joys and satisfactions of parenthood.

And in addition they might produce hordes of adolescents trying to resolve their identity crises by roaming through the countryside looking for their parents. One young man I know who was an abandoned baby in Berlin after Hitler's war has been known to tell the couple who adopted him and brought him up that he sometimes thinks of going to Berlin to look for his mother whom he has not seen or heard from since early infancy. Members of staff of utopian institutions for the young would often hear of plans to track down parents even if it was thought that they lived in Ruislip or some similarly philistine place.

It is likely to be said that anyone who discusses the idea that we are born equal in the way that I have done is either a fool or a knave or indeed quite probably both. Social status at birth, it might be argued, does not really come into the matter since as one formula puts it men are born equal in dignity and rights. Another interpretation of the idea is that men are born equal as moral agents. But dignity and rights simply cannot be separated from social position and status. Those who are born into abject poverty can have very little dignity and their struggle for survival may not allow exercising whatever rights they may have. Also paying attention to rights in the strict legal sense of the term can at times simply obscure important social realities and inequalities. It is easy enough to say smugly that all British citizens have equal legal rights but the ability to pay for a good lawyer gives at least some advantage to the rich when they are involved with the courts. An infant who is well looked after by a nanny and other staff in a large and well equipped nursery as well as by his mother is treated with more dignity from birth than an infant who is born in a cold and wet shack in refugee camp. The idea that people are born equal as moral agents does not completely

stand up to the examination as our analysis of the role of moral agent has in effect shown. Strictly speaking people are not born moral agents at all, they become moral agents gradually over a period of time. And at the end of the day they are not equal as moral agents. There is no moral equality between those who approve of slavery and those who disapprove of it or between those who approve of South African apartheid and those who disapprove of it. One aspect of the role of moral agent is being entitled to be treated with respect and men are equal as far as that aspect of the role is concerned. In addition if we want infants and children to become moral agents we must treat them with respect because that aspect of the role can come into operation before the others for which it can serve as a foundation. In particular being treated with respect is a foundation and preparation for treating others with respect because those who have not been treated with respect may find it extremely difficult to treat others with respect. We can say then that throughout their lives from birth to death men are equally entitled to be treated with respect. Even murderers are entitled to be treated with respect because in spite of their terrible moral failure they usually behave in a morally satisfactory fashion in most if not indeed all other areas of their lives. Treating them with respect may also play some part in preventing them from repeating their moral failure. Whether or not people actually do receive the respect to which they are entitled depends to a large extent on social circumstances. But the important point is that we have discovered a sense in which it is true to say that men are born equal.

One possible interpretation of the slogan 'all men are born equal' is that it means not that all men are equal but that they should be equal in every respect and at all times. In other words the slogan can be regarded as prescriptive rather than descriptive. Total equality



at all times would however require the abolition of all ancillary and all competitive tasks and activities. That price can simply be regarded as too high to pay.

It is reasonable to conclude our study of roles and equality by taking note of the fact that a consideration of roles should prevent us from thinking that equality is a monolithic concept. Normally when we compare cars and indeed objects in general we say that they are equal or unequal in this respect or in that respect. We do not, I think, often say without qualification that they are simply equal or unequal. In the case of cars for example we say that two or more of them are equally hideous, equally dangerous, equally destructive of civilised values and so on. When we are talking about people however we seem to be inclined to say that they are simply equal or unequal. As we have to a large extent already seen it is very difficult to make such sense of such assertions. In particular the problem is not solved by saying that people are equal or unequal from the moral point of view or as moral agents. The study of roles should remind us that two people may be roughly equal in one role and totally unequal in another. Brown and Bloggs may be equally poor drivers and politicians but totally unequal as husbands and squash players. In addition people are not in any simple or monolithic sense equal or unequal from biological or psychological points of view. There are many biological and psychological scales and dimensions along which people can be arranged and with which they can be measured. The complexity of human equality and inequality does not stop there because no aspect of a person can be considered in isolation from all the other aspects. A person's marriage, job, and verbal skills all affect each other. As we shall see in chapter V our understandings of people must be idiographic. Perhaps we should end our discussion of human equality by saying that the statement 'all men are equal', and

'all men are born equal' are prima facie false because of the wide variety and complexity of social roles and of the characteristics both biological and psychological of individuals. As we have seen there is only one extremely limited but also extremely important sense in which all men are equal and are born equal. All men are equally worthy of respect. Any attempt to make men totally equal would involve sacrificing and trying to eliminate valuable social and individual inequalities and their often equally valuable interactions and combinations.

#### Section 5 - Sartre's Waiter

The barren desert of the philosophical discussion of roles is dominated by one huge figure, the figure of a waiter. Unfortunately Sartre's waiter has become a scarecrow because his presence in the literature of the subject has led to the common belief that the claim of roles to be taken seriously in philosophical discussion has been dismissed for all time by the two words 'mauvais foi'. In this work our task is to start cultivating the desert in the hope that one day it may blossom if not exactly like the rose then at least like a topic such as the freedom of the will. It is necessary therefore to deal with the waiter. Good accounts of the problem are to be found in the writings of Professor R Downie and Professor Dorothy Emmet.

In her book Rules, Roles and Relations Prof. Emmet writes expounding Sartre (p 152)

To accept a role is to evade the responsibility of seeing that one is free not so to act, and of freely deciding what one wants to be. It is to evade freedom by sheltering behind one's social function. This freedom Sartre calls 'contingency': the terrifying realization that there is no need to play this role, or indeed any other in particular, unless one so chooses.

Despite what Sartre thinks one cannot escape from roles if one wishes to act any more than one can escape from language if one wishes

to speak or make a statement. That point will be discussed in chapter VI. Accepting a role normally involves an awareness of alternative roles and is usually a matter of deciding what one wants to be. And so it is most certainly not a matter of evading freedom by sheltering behind one's social function whatever that may mean.

When one is dealing directly with the waiter it is useful to turn to Downie who writes in his book Roles and Values (pp 132 - 133)

The importance of maintaining a concept of personality irreducible to roles is emphasized, as we have seen, by Existentialist thinking. We have already pointed out that Sartre, for example, condemns the idea that a man is nothing but a waiter, soldier, etc. It is true up to a point that for a waiter to be morally good is for him to act as a waiter, and so on for any trade or profession. But the waiter in Sartre's example is being a waiter to the extent that he has forgotten that he is also a person who is a waiter. Again, to see a waiter as nothing but a waiter and a shopkeeper as nothing but a shopkeeper is to fail to respect them as persons. Moral agents are always people acting; sometimes they are simply as persons, and sometimes as persons in certain roles or capacities. But however much the rights and duties of the role affect a given action the morality of the action is never wholly reducible to the rights and duties of the role; there is always an irreducibly personal element in any moral action, and a person cannot completely transfer the moral responsibility for what he does to his role.

There are two aspects in which a person's responsibility cannot be analysed in terms of the rights and duties of his role. To begin with, it is as a person that he accepts the rights and duties of a given role in the first place. The morality of role-acceptance is therefore necessarily not reducible to that of the role which is accepted. It is as persons plain and simple that we are responsible for the role we accept or reject. Secondly, a person brings to his actions in his chosen role qualities which are not analysable in terms of the role. For example, we may praise a shopkeeper for his courteous and cheerful service, but 'courteous' and 'cheerful' are terms of praise for the person's enactment of his chosen role; they cannot therefore be reduced to the concepts of the role itself.

It is perhaps not entirely clear whether Downie is using the word 'personality' in its philosophical or its psychological sense. As



far as the psychological sense of the term is concerned personality is to a large extent formed by role experience. From the philosophical point of view personality arises from the combination of individuals which are purely biological and roles which turn them into persons. That point will be expanded in the General Conclusion. Certainly roles do not give us a total explanation of personality in either sense of the term but at the same time they make an essential contribution to it.

Seeing a waiter as nothing but a waiter is a matter of forgetting that he has other roles besides that of waiter.. In the case of someone who is trapped in one role and has become a personification of it one perceives accurately if one perceives him as only a prisoner or a chronic patient or a regular soldier or whatever. One would be showing respect for such a person if one made it possible for him to escape from his imprisoning role into other roles which he might know for the first time or which he might have known in the past. It is not entirely clear if Downie equates the terms 'person' and 'moral agent'. In any event as we have seen acting as a moral agent means acting in the role of moral agent. It is not at all clear what acting simply as a person means. Imagining that one can act without using roles is like imagining that one can speak without using a language. That point will be further discussed in chapter VI. A person can transfer the moral responsibility for what he does to the role of moral agent or at least to his interpretation of it. But he cannot completely transfer moral responsibility to that role because his other roles are also involved in producing some of the aspects of any moral problem.

In the Introduction we saw that Downie talks as if all roles were achieved and none were ascribed. It is not as persons plain and simple, whatever they may be, that we are responsible for the

role we accept or reject. As a husband and a father I may decide that it would be advisable to change my job. A person brings to his actions in a chosen role qualities that are not analysable in terms of that role because they come either from other roles or from his biological constitution. A shopkeeper may be cheerful because of the state of his hormones or his metabolism or whatever and he may be courteous because many years ago as a pupil in some dreadful school he was taught to be courteous.

It is to be hoped that we have at least done something to question and cast doubt on the existentialist dismissal of role theory from the philosophical scene. Now we must leave the topic of roles and morality and turn in the next chapter to the frequently neglected topics of the physical and linguistic aspects of roles.

## Chapter III

### THE PHYSICAL AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF ROLES

#### Section 1 - Settings, Equipment and Dress

In this chapter we are concerned with matters which are simple and to a large extent fairly obvious but which are also important. They are important both within the context of role theory and within a wider philosophical context part of which is considered in this work. It might seem at first sight that all the simple and obvious points about things and language which are the main topics of this chapter have already been made in philosophical discussion. The philosophical literature on physical objects is vast and so is the philosophical literature on language. The problem is however that epistemology and ethics are flourishing subjects but social philosophy, as we noted in the Preface, scarcely exists. And so although there has been much talk in philosophy about the existence of physical objects there has been remarkably little talk about their social importance and significance. Similarly language has been studied in great detail by both epistemologists and moral philosophers but a lot remains to be said about its social significance despite the fact that Wittgenstein started the social philosophy of language many years ago. Most of our discussion of things takes place in this chapter but in the next chapter we shall pay some attention to one kind of thing, namely machines, both from an epistemological and a social point of view. In chapter VI we shall once again be concerned with the relationship between language and roles when we consider roles as the language of action.

As far as a study of roles is concerned it is important to



emphasise that they are not totally abstract entities which cannot be seen or heard. In actual fact roles have important physical and linguistic aspects which surround us all the time. In a sense roles can be both seen and heard and we see and hear them all the time. Yet just as a man born and bred beside a waterfall may never hear it and may never be aware of it so although we have all seen and heard roles or at least their physical and linguistic aspects since birth we may nevertheless be unaware of the fact and so it may be necessary to point out what is or should be more or less obvious. Let us start with things and the physical aspect of roles.

It is common to regard things as remote from persons. Things are more inanimate objects and so are far removed from conscious beings and moral agents. There is however an obvious physical rather than metaphysical sense in which things are very close to, let us say, people rather than persons. We are surrounded by things. When philosophers start discussions about perception by referring to the tables and chairs which surround them they are inadvertently drawing attention to the academic's use of a study or library and they also illustrate the common tendency to regard one's clothes as part of oneself. Underwear manufacturers rightly point out from time to time that their products come next to oneself. Ties and shirts are as reasonable starting points for a discussion of perception as tables and chairs. If a certain amount of solidity is required, shoes might be found useful. In everyday life things are important in the way in which things are important on the stage and in team games. We must return to the analogies we used at the beginning of the work. In the theatre we get a certain amount of information about a new play from the programme. Scene one, we are told, takes place in Lavinia's bedroom after midnight and scene two in the middle of Christ Church

Meadow two hours later. When the curtain rises the set, relevant stage properties and lighting also give us some information about what is going to happen because they create a setting for activity. We may however be totally surprised. Someone may decide that Lavinia's bedroom is the only possible place for announcing the end of the world and anything can happen on Christ Church Meadow despite the elaborate rules which undergraduates find so hilarious. But a set arouses at least vague expectations and if they are completely flouted then there will be a greater or lesser sense of comedy and absurdity or sometimes impressiveness and dignity. Philosophising and giving birth are not unusual activities but if one does the first in a tub and the second in a stable one may attract a certain amount of attention. Nudity and intercourse are commonplace in bedrooms and obligatory on stage at the present time, but they are not common in Christ Church Meadow during the hours of daylight. Coronations in either place at any time are unusual and so noteworthy.

When an actor comes on to the stage his costume if any tells us a fair amount about this part before he begins to speak. Hamlet's mourning dress makes it clear that he disassociates himself from his mother and his uncle and the rest of the court. Stage costume can indicate the period of the play and that is possibly the only aspect of stage costume which has no exact parallel in everyday life. We understand that Lady Macbeth is sleep walking not only from lighting effects, bodily movements and facial expression, but also from her dress. In actual life getting up in the middle of the night and leaving one's bedroom fully dressed is very different from getting up and leaving one's bedroom in pyjamas or whatever. What happens next is likely to be very different in each case. The different types of dress show different types of intentions and are part of different situations.

Except for cases of emergency action such as chasing a burglar or fleeing from a burning building, if one is in one's pyjamas, one does not perhaps expect to go very far or to meet anyone one does not know well. If one is completely dressed one is reasonably prepared to go almost anywhere and meet almost anyone. Sleepwalkers such as Lady Macbeth are not aware of what they are doing so they might appear in nightwear in the most unlikely places. - At an athletics meeting or a rugby match, what is happening is indicated by the setting, dress and equipment in exactly the same way as on the stage. The setting is very precisely divided into areas set aside for specific purposes. The markings on a rugby pitch or a running track may be regarded as playing a part in governing the activities for which these places were designed. The dress worn by and the equipment used by the participants in rugby matches and athletic meetings are carefully prescribed. Biological factors play some part in determining the form of all dress and especially athletic and sporting dress, but the history of such dress should make it clear that social factors are dominant. In the past participants in athletic events have worn clothing which would now be regarded as totally excessive and unsuitable from the biological point of view. Changing social conventions concerned with modesty and decency have been the governing factors in this matter. But apart from social conventions and biological considerations athletic dress indicates roles. Opposing rugby teams wear different colours and the referee must wear colours different from those of either team. Athletes wear numbers and colours both in order to make individual identification easy and to indicate club membership. Starters and judges are distinguished from each other by different types of dress.

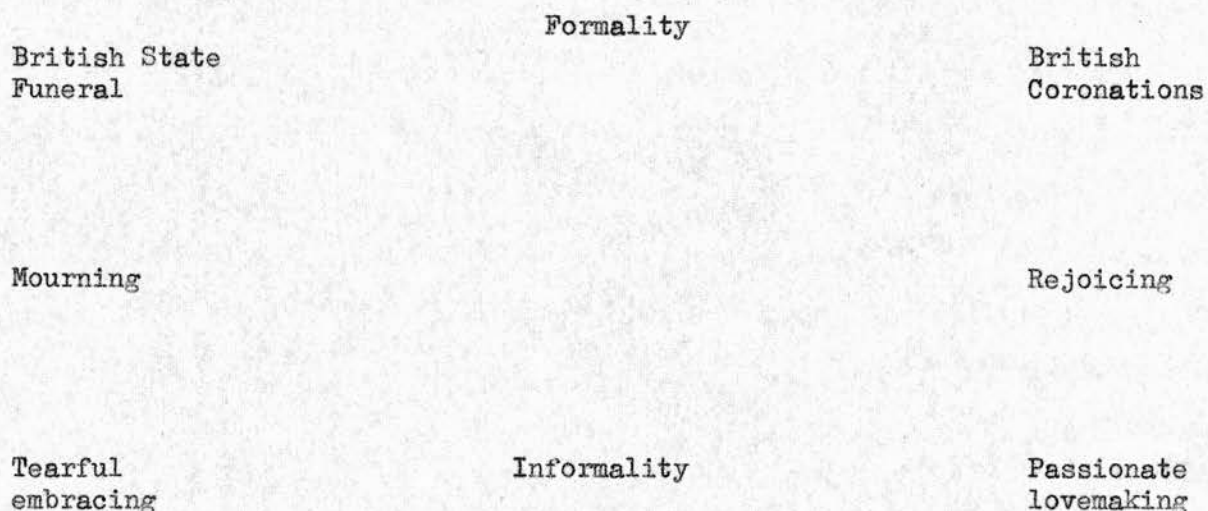
It is now time to apply the theatrical and athletic analogy to non-theatrical and non-athletic activities. Most human activities take



place in a setting and involve the use of appropriate equipment and the wearing of appropriate dress. Since settings, equipment and dress are all the products of technology, their importance for the understanding of human action is a function of technological advance. Many roles are defined in terms of things and we cannot e.g. understand what a typist or an airline pilot does without understanding something about typewriters or aeroplanes. That point will be taken further in a later section. In a technologically primitive society settings may be limited to caves, clearings and primitive huts; equipment to crudely shaped pieces of stone and wood and clothing to animal skins. But in present day Western society the complexity of settings, clothing and equipment is very considerable and it is not always an easy matter to understand them. A room is possibly the most common setting for many human activities but it is usually best to consider the building in which the room is situated as the relevant setting. Sometimes one may have to take into account the street, the area~~x~~ of the town, the town, the region and country in which the building is situated. The three main types of human activity in an industrial society, family life, work and recreation, tend to take place in different types of building. There are obvious exceptions to this general rule such as a place of entertainment which is also a place of work for its staff and houses which may be centres of both work and family life for wives. Normally when one goes into a building one knows roughly what type of activity one expects to find in it and what one's own part in that activity will be. And that general knowledge helps one to understand the behaviour of people one meets in the building. One can of course be surprised. One may enter a bank and find that the manager is having his teeth extracted in the strong room and that ballet dancers have taken over the rest of the building for rehearsal purposes. But life would become chaotic and impossible if one could have no

expectations about the types of behaviour to be found in different types of buildings or if such expectations were not frequently fulfilled. Normally the activities taking place in any one building are complicated and as well as being aware of the general activity for which the building is used one must also understand the particular sections or aspects of that activity which are carried on in particular parts of the building. Kitchens, bathrooms, managers' offices, store-rooms, operating theatres, waiting rooms, committee rooms and typing pools are highly specialised types of rooms which have an identity which is partially independent of the larger settings of which they normally form a part. The independence is distinctly partial however because the difference between a kitchen in a private house and one in an hotel and between an operating theatre in a maternity hospital and one in a dental hospital is determined by the settings in which these sub settings are situated. Equipment and dress relate to settings in the way that stage properties and costumes relate to stage sets. They tend to be appropriate to the relevant activity and they play an important part in the activity. It is very confusing if a head waiter wears the same dress as the other waiters. A Scottish judge who used to have to impose the death penalty of which he personally disapproved once said that wearing full judicial dress including, as was the Scottish custom on such occasions, a black eighteenth century tricorne hat, helped him to speak in accordance with the requirements of his role despite his private beliefs. A naked society would be socially confusing and impoverished. Hospitals have been faced with the equivalent of staff nudity in the form of almost universal staff white coats. Labels indicating roles such as anaesthetist and dietician have had to be used to solve the problem. Apart from uniforms, quasi uniforms and role labels, different types of dress serve the purpose of indicating formality or informality, age, life styles, beliefs and

attitudes. One aspect of social activity is the differences in atmosphere amongst different social events. There are probably four important parameters of social atmosphere. One is a formality-informality parameter, another a hostility co-operation parameter the third a mourning-rejoicing parameter and the fourth a public-private parameter. For present purposes let us simplify matters and use only two of these parameters, the formality-informality one and the mourning-rejoicing one. From these parameters we get a rectangular field of atmosphere in which each corner represents an extreme type of atmosphere. Social events for the corners of the field might be a British state funeral (formal mourning) a British Coronation (formal rejoicing) tearful embracing (informal mourning) and passionate love making (informal rejoicing).



Right in the middle of the field we might want to place strolling in a public park as a type of activity which is equidistant from the extreme of formality, mourning, informality and rejoicing. Clothing plays its part in atmosphere and the relevant role performances. A consideration of the types of clothing, if any worn during the activities and situations outlined above should make this clear. The atmosphere of



a social event or activity is to a large extent a function of the relationship between the roles of the participants. At the same time it has to be said that the nature of the event or the activity controls the roles to the extent that if events and activities follow their normal course only certain aspects of the relevant roles are usually involved in them. An English king and the archbishop who crowns him may very well get drunk together but not normally during the course of a coronation ceremony. Role style and interpretation as well as background roles may also influence the atmosphere of social events and activities. If a prison official invites an ex prisoner to a party at his house the prison official prisoner relationship is likely to influence even if only in slight and amusing ways the dominant and foreground guests' host relationship.

Equipment, which should be taken to include furniture and furnishings, does not require much consideration at this stage. Its more important aspects will be considered in the following section on technology. Here it is sufficient to say that equipment makes settings precise. Most unfurnished rooms could be used for a great many purposes but once they are furnished and equipped, the range of possibilities is greatly narrowed down. When a room has been fully equipped for post mortem examinations people are unlikely to want to hold a party in it unless it is some kind of sick joke party. But before it was furnished and equipped the same room might have seemed to have considerable potential as a setting for a party.

It is possible to say very briefly what the social significance of settings, dress and equipment is. They are the physical aspects of roles and constantly remind people of their own and other people's roles. One might even go so far as to say that they have a tendency to control human activities in as much as they are the visible aspects of the roles which

form the framework of these activities.

## Section 2 - Technology

Human beings alter, control and increasingly create their physical environment. But their ability to do so depends to a large extent on things. The amount of force which a human being can exert on his environment without the aid of things is extremely limited and the number of ways in which that force can be exerted is also very limited. Not much can be done apart from a certain amount of pushing, pulling, lifting, throwing and snapping. Such a simple operation as cutting or digging cannot be carried out without an instrument. The things which are used to modify and control the environment are variously known as tools, instruments and machines. It is doubtful if one can draw clear-cut distinctions between these three types of things. One should perhaps note that they are all used to extend bodily powers and that important groups of them are used for travel and communication and for scientific purposes. Scientific instruments are concerned with understanding the world rather than controlling it and many of them such as microscopes and telescopes are concerned with observation and many such as thermometers and micrometer screw gauges are concerned with measurement. The acquisition of empirical knowledge is to a large extent dependent on things because man's powers of observation are extremely limited if only the unaided senses are used, and also because objective measurement is virtually impossible without things such as measuring rods and weighing machines.

If one is studying roles tools, instruments and machines are important because many roles are defined in terms of their use. The invention of typewriters, aeroplanes and computers has produced the roles of typist,

airline pilot and computer programmer. The importance of the machines for these roles is quite different from the importance of a stethoscope for a doctor. There were doctors before there were stethoscopes and it is possible to listen to heart sounds without a stethoscope. But by definition there were no airline pilots before there were aeroplanes.. The importance of equipment in the medical field is of course very considerable and there were no radiologists or radiographers before there were X-ray machines, no anaesthetists before there were anaesthetics and anaesthetic machines. The main point however is that it is meaningful to talk of machine dependent roles and to distinguish them from machine using roles. Probably most roles are machine using at the present time. In technologically primitive societies, if there are any machine dependent roles they are probably regarded as relatively unimportant. In the early stage of industrialisation the most common machine dependent role is probably that of factory worker or machine minder. Such a person performs very simple tasks, but the person who controls an anaesthetic machine or an airliner performs extremely complicated tasks and has human life in his hands. In a variety of ways machines have as it were moved closer to human beings and that point will be investigated further in the next chapter on animals and machines.

Musical instruments give rise to a special class of machine dependent roles which should be mentioned briefly. Some people would doubtless object to calling musical instruments machines and their objection draws attention to the evaluative and emotive meanings which not only the word 'machine' but also the related words 'tool' and 'instrument' have. We are using the word 'machine' in this context in a neutral and extended sense which covers instruments and tools. The role of musical instrumentalist is generally regarded as an artistic and creative one but it is also totally machine dependent. The quality of musical instruments is



important for satisfactory performance. The most skilled instrumentalist cannot triumph as it were over a poor instrument. And a new type of instrument means a new type of music. One cannot understand the difference between harpsichord music and piano music without understanding the difference between the harpsichord and the piano. The admittedly rather special case of the role of musical instrumentalist may prevent us from adopting the common supercilious attitude to machine dependent roles. Airline pilots and computer programmers also occupy machine dependent roles which require high skills and abilities of a high order. One's attitudes to machine dependent roles in general must take account of their increasing range and complexity. The roles of grave-digger and stoker can no longer be regarded as paradigm cases of machine dependent roles.

### Section 3 - Property and Territory

From the social point of view property and territory are fundamental to the understanding of things. If one is to survive in society one must learn at an early age to distinguish between public and private property and one's own private property and other peoples private property. The concept of ownership is a complicated one but we shall not investigate it here. It is sufficient for our purposes that we can use and understand such sentences as 'He owns that car' and 'That park belongs to the local authority'. Territory and property are very often linked. One's property is usually on one's own territory, e.g. one's plastic gnomes tend to be in one's own garden rather than in one's neighbour's although one's aesthetically discerning children may throw them over the wall and one's contraceptives are more likely to be in one's own bedroom than in one's son's although one's son may very well remove them to his own room.

In order to understand many role performances one must understand the ideas of quasi property and quasi territory. Frequently in bureaucratic organisations employees are assigned territory, property and equipment for their role performance. One is given an office and/or a desk and one may also be given a secretary. As far as the legal notion of property is concerned these things belong to the organisation and not to the employee but as far as the day to day work of the organisation is concerned, they are regarded as having been handed over to the employee for as long as he holds the relevant post. Accordingly they may be regarded as quasi territory and property as distinct from real territory and property such as a house which one owns filled with one's own furniture. Someone who lives in rented furnished accommodation lives and probably works in quasi territory although from the legal point of view, that kind of quasi territory is very different from the kind used by employees during working hours. Clearly, there are degrees of ownership and quasi ownership. At the one extreme we have what we legally own and at the other what we have borrowed or stolen. If one wished to pursue this topic for its own sake one might want to consider the ownership and quasi ownership of books in university towns where bookshops and libraries normally have very heavy losses. At Oxford one was often astonished to hear people say that they got all their books from Blackwells but never paid for them. As far as our present purposes are concerned, there is no need to consider the matter further.

Role performances that take place on the performer's own territory or quasi territory may be different in subtle ways from those that take place on someone else's territory. One is dominant in one's own territory. The undertaker is dominant amongst the horrors of his funeral parlour but he is a ~~guest~~ and hence subordinate when he comes to Aunt Agatha's house to measure the cook's corpse. And one is not as

dominant in one's subordinate's territory as one is in one's own. A secretary is dominant in her own office and so if one wishes to feel really superior to her it is best to summon her to one's own. Even a prisoner in his cell has a slight dominance over the oddities who rush in and out to see him. Again it is best to summon him to one's own office if one wishes to be more patronisingly superior than usual. Perhaps we should notice here that people make their territory their own by the use of personal objects many of which relate to roles of the occupant other than that performed in the territory in question. In the office one finds a photograph of wife and family and in the sitting room at home the house journal of the organisation which does not allow its employees to see their wives and families very often. Pieces of personal property are especially important in quasi territory where for the occupant at any rate they stand out amongst the pieces of quasi property. One's ancestral swords may play an important part in decorating one's office and when one removes them in preparation for one's departure one may feel like a stranger in a strange place because of their absence. The lower orders are not of course allowed to have offices but even night watchmen's huts are sometimes made personal by the use of a limited range of painted slogans or even four letter words. And long distance lorry drivers may hang personal items in their cabs. Prisoners often counteract the effect of drab uniforms by carrying the carefully and elaborately ornamented tobacco tins which seem to make life more bearable for them. And in their cells these tobacco tins along with photographs of wives and children, pet birds, drawings and paintings in some very small measure help to counteract the effects of chamber pots.

Territory is an aspect of the physical aspect of roles because it is in the most general sense a setting for some of the roles of those whose territory it is. At the same time it can be the setting for



some of the roles of other people. But as we have seen the roles of these others are likely to be subordinate to the roles of the owners or quasi owners of the territory. When one goes to one's solicitor in order to draw up one's will, one is as it were upstaged up him on his own territory even if one's will is much more interesting and impressive than his own and even if one is a barrister or a judge. One's breakfast room is primarily a setting for the breakdown of one's own marriage and so one may never notice the servant who faithfully helps matters along by serving cold coffee and burnt toast. And one's adolescent sone may find one's whole house totally a setting for one's own life so that he frequently wants to flee from it. There are exceptions to the point we have just made and they can be unpleasant. A policeman who searches a private house turns someone else's territory into his own for the duration of the search and that dramatic change in the usual state of affairs can be traumatic for the owners of the house. Similarly in the world of quasi territory cell searches may upset prisoners. And one can learn a lot about roles in relation to territory and quasi territory from the fact that prison officers who specialise in cell searches are referred to by their colleagues as 'burglars' as in the expression 'we'll get the burglars in for Brown's cell'.

It is advisable to pause at this stage before we go on to consider the linguistic aspects of roles. At present we are wandering around in a vast area in which there are very few if any satisfactory philosophical landmarks or guide posts. Our friends the existentialists have however said one or two things about the topics we have been discussing. A useful account of existentialism is given by Professor John Macquarrie in his book Existentialism which is to be found in a series devoted to the improbable subject of 'theological resources'. Perhaps it is possible to regard Macquarrie not only as a theologian

but also as the only British existentialist philosopher of whom one has heard. In his book Macquarrie writes (p 61) 'Instruments are interlocking. They imply one another, in systems and subsystems, A pen implies paper; the paper implies a postal system; the postal system implies methods of transportation, and so on. Today, as we often hear, we live in the context of a world of immense complexity where everything seems to affect everything else. What articulates this world and gives significance to each single item within it is human concern. The everyday world is correlated with the range of human concern. That is what gives unity and system to the multifarious items embraced within the world' Our talk about the physical aspects of roles has I think been more satisfactory than Macquarrie's talk about 'human concern'. There are a great many types of human concern and a great many types of things people can be concerned about. One type of concern about things is a desire to destroy them. People can be concerned about logical problems. Instead of saying that the everyday world is correlated with the range of human concern it would be much more precise to say that the everyday world in Macquarrie's sense of the term, consists of the physical aspects of roles. And instead of saying what Macquarrie said in the last sentence of his that we quoted above it would be much better to say that the physical world becomes part of the social world and acquires social significances through roles and because of the physical aspects of roles.

In the same chapter of his book Macquarrie talks about (p 62) 'the idea of the world as an instrumental system that derives its unity and meaning from the organizing concern of man' And he goes on to say that 'At the beginning of the century Bergson was pointing out that tools are simply extensions of man's body, and similar ideas have been taken up more recently by Marshall McLuhan. But the total instrumental system

within which these tools have their place and significance, namely the world, is also an extension of man'. Once again it would be much more precise to talk about the physical aspects of roles instead of the idea of world as an instrumental system', and 'the organising concern of man'. People do not normally set out to organise the physical world just for the sake of doing so, rather they produce and adapt the physical world in accordance with the requirements of roles and the social purposes and activities of which they are a part. The idea of the world as an extension of man is also best clarified by an account of the physical aspects of roles which show us how the world is related to human action. Not for the first time we see that existentialists make the great mistake of paying too little attention to roles. Now we can forget their unfortunate lapse and turn to the linguistic aspects of roles.



#### Section 4 - Roles and Linguistic Behaviour

Although quite a few things may happen before the actors start to speak it is only when they do that the play really gets under way. What the characters in the play say to each other will to a large extent be governed by their roles. Similarly off stage what people say to each other is also governed by their roles.

Language is perhaps the principal means of interpersonal contact and the roles of the contacting parties will to a large extent determine the linguistic expressions used. Interpersonal contact usually starts with one party attracting the attention of the other party or parties. Normally this is done linguistically though the linguistic behaviour may be combined with non-linguistic behaviour such as smiling and hand waving, and if linguistic behaviour is risky, non-linguistic behaviour only such as nudging, winking, prodding and coughing may be used. The appropriate linguistic behaviour may be directed at people in general or it may be more specific. Expressions such as 'help' and 'here is an announcement' are used for people in general and forms of address are used for someone or some people in particular. Role relationships are shown in forms of address. One can usually tell whether someone is speaking to a peer, a surrogate or a subordinate by paying attention to the form of address alone. And the roles of the relevant parties determine the relationships in the relevant situation. The forms of address set the scene as it were and all that follows takes place within the limits of that scene. It is as well to note that even in very tactual forms of interpersonal contact such as boxing, wrestling and sex language plays an important part. The words spoken by umpires and judges control boxing and wrestling and the publication of that indispensable guide to modern travel 'How to Make Love in Five Languages' reminds us that in the

most tactical of situations language has a part to play.

Not all roles are equally verbal. Many working class roles such as those of coalminer and engine driver are largely non-verbal. Most middle class roles are verbal and some such as barrister and teacher are highly verbal. At times the verbal element is prescribed and ritualistic but normally there are loose conventions about the type of thing which it is proper for occupants of various roles to say when they are speaking in an official capacity. Judges passing sentence are likely in many legal systems to use a prescribed form of words. Bank clerks do not make use of ritualistic words but they are bound by certain conventions. Speaking as bank clerks they cannot ask people about the state of their teeth but they can make mild comments about peoples spending habits and bank managers can make considerably stronger comments on the same subject. Assuming a role means assuming certain linguistic habits while one is acting in the role.

At times what people want to say to others, or feel needs to be said to others clashes strongly with the relevant role situations. Most people discover sooner or later that if they go too far beyond the linguistic boundaries of their roles they are likely to encounter very considerable hostility or anger. Seniors can say things to their juniors that juniors cannot say to their seniors. Politicians can say things in public that civil servants cannot say in public and so on. 'He was not in a position to say that' is possibly the most usual criticism of someone who gets on the wrong side of linguistic role boundaries. In an angrier tone of voice someone may sharpen the criticism by saying 'he seems to forget that he is an X and not a Y' or 'he seems to forget that he is only an X and not a Y' where X and Y are roles. Most people learn sooner or later how to deal with these difficulties. One can get others to say what one cannot say oneself because of their

role position and one's own. Possibly the most obvious example of that move is the situation where a committee secretary whispers in the chairman's ear and the chairman then says "the secretary has just reminded me that ...". In such a situation the secretary considers it inadvisable to say something himself but he gets the chairman to say it for him. The matter in question is regarded as being more appropriately said by the chairman than by the secretary. In more elaborate cases there are several links in the chain. Someone drops a hint to someone else who does the same and so on until eventually the person whom the first person had in mind is told whatever the first person wanted to tell him by someone quite far removed from the first person. The information or opinion in question has to be passed up or along until it reaches someone who is in a position to pass it on to the person for whom it was intended. Once a school mistress told me that she found it very helpful having her daughter, in the same school as a pupil because through her she heard the other girls' comments on her clothes. "Oh mummy you can't wear that skirt again because the other girls say it's awful" was evidently the kind of comment that the school mistress found useful. School girls cannot normally tell their mistresses how dreadful their clothes are but one girl can speak to another and a girl can pass the vital news on to her mother. When I was a university administrator I was sometimes given information that I was clearly meant to pass on. When lecturers in a certain department told me that one of their professors undertook virtually no teaching duties whatsoever, clearly they imagined that someone could do something about the matter. It was fairly obvious to me that no one could, but I felt duty bound to pass the information on so I told the dean of the faculty who could simply say in a sad sort of way that he had long suspected that Professor X was incredibly lazy even by academic standards. Sometimes one finds that intermediaries are not necessary and



that occupants of apparently remote roles can speak very freely to each other. Queen Victoria was by all accounts able to speak very freely indeed to a certain Mr John Brown who was her gamekeeper. Doubtless Mr Brown could tell her things that Mr Gladstone could not but presumably Mr Brown did not address her as if she were a public meeting as Mr Gladstone is supposed to have done. Brown and Victoria cases are noticed because they are exceptional. Possibly more usual are cases like the one I came across in rural Scotland where a woman's chauffeur was urged to give her quite a lot of rather personal advice but he refused on the ground that he simply did not want to place his job at risk and it was not his place to give her such advice. Even in less feudal societies there are limits to what for example secretaries can say to their bosses.

Individuals may have to watch carefully at times what role they are occupying when they say certain things. Mrs Brown can say that Mr Snodgrass is a horrible bastard when she is at home talking to her husband but things may be more difficult when she is working in the office as Mr Snodgrass's secretary. Certainly she can say such things in the office but she has to be careful to whom she says them. There is however a widely used convention which allows people to say what they in one sense cannot say. It is generally accepted that people may speak unofficially and off the record provided they make it clear that that is what they are doing. Possibly the Pope comes top in this matter because he uses the device of speaking *ex cathedra* and *non ex cathedra*. The rest of us write some things on official paper and other things on non official paper. Once I was a candidate in an examination about which there was some confusion. In the middle of the confusion one of the examiners wrote to me from his private address and on private note paper. Clearly he wished to indicate that by not using the headed note paper of his university department his remarks were unofficial and off the

record. But this case shows us clearly that in saying things off the record one does not move from one role to another but stays within one role. What the lecturer said in his letter could only have been said by an examiner in the relevant examination. The letter was a letter from an examiner to a candidate. At an earlier stage of my life I used to be somewhat amused by letters sent to my mother by my solicitor uncle. They were typed by his secretary on his office note paper but he scored out the heading at the top of the paper. By that procedure he made it clear that although he was writing in the Lincoln's Inn Fields setting of his solicitor role he was in fact writing as a brother-in-law to a sister-in-law. It would be wrong to imagine that the points we have been discussing apply only to work roles and that in family roles for example people can say absolutely anything to each other and that there cannot be even equivalents of speaking on and off the record and officially and unofficially. If we think that a husband should not live off his wife's earnings as a prostitute then presumably we think that he should not suggest to her that he should. Similarly if we think that a father should not have sexual intercourse with his daughter or bugger his son then presumably we think that he should not suggest such things to his daughter or his son. Family roles do not give their occupants complete freedom of expression. Saying certain things may be incompatible with such roles and if occupants of these roles do say the forbidden things and say them seriously then they are likely to experience some form of crisis in which their occupancy of the relevant role is likely to be called in question. At times fathers and sons may speak to each other as if they were contemporaries. They may for example go out drinking together on that basis. What they say on that basis is as it were off the record and unofficial.

Communication in the limited sense of passing information from one

individual to another is a role bound activity. What one tells the milkman, gas fitter or rat catcher who calls at one's house depends very little on his personal characteristics and a great deal on the relevant role situation. One may of course become very friendly with the rat catcher or even a gas fitter and move from role bound interaction to interaction based largely on individual characteristics. But because of the role bound nature of communication it is not dependent on individual characteristics. It is possible to enter into communication with shop keepers, doctors and bus conductors who are complete strangers. One understands their roles and they understand one's own whatever it may be. Just as in a wider sense one can understand what someone is saying if one knows his language so one can in more precise sense communicate with someone if one knows his role. Indeed although a full discussion of the language of action will not be undertaken until Chapter VI we can perhaps at this stage just begin to see what is involved in that concept. Language games are part of action games and action games are to be understood in terms of roles. One of the most important elements involved in learning a role is learning the language of the role in the sense of learning the terms and expressions peculiar to the role. Normally the actions and the language of a role go together. Shop assistants for example learn the language and the actions of selling at the same time and most important of all they learn to relate them to each other. Only if a shop assistant starts off the selling game by displaying great interests in what the customer wants and indeed tries to find it will he end up being able to sell him what the shop wants to sell because it is expensive and selling badly. Some roles are almost entirely linguistic and involve very little in the way of non linguistic action but they are probably somewhat exceptional and may not be very important. Consider the role of philosopher for example. One becomes



a philosopher by learning philosophy until one reaches the stage of being able to display a high degree of philosophical competence and if possible of originality. Learning philosophy and displaying philosophical competence and originality are linguistic activities. Those philosophers who are academics are supposed to have and in some cases undoubtedly do have teaching and examining skills. These skills are also linguistic. There are virtually no non-linguistic skills required by philosophers. Some philosophers are skilled in producing pregnant silences but that skill may not be found to any great extent outside Cambridge. In my day at Oxford a post graduate philosopher from Cambridge surveyed the Oxford philosophical scene and came to the undoubtedly true conclusion that 'Oxford philosophers say too much'. Unlike philosophers dentists have considerable non verbal skills. Restorative dentistry, orthodontics, minor oral surgery and dental prosthetics are all activities that involve manual skills as well as language games. But all branches of dentistry rest on the assumption that there are people who understand and are willing to occupy the role of dental patient. Dentist and patient communicate with each other by accepting each others roles. That acceptance is the basis of their interaction or communication. Now let us return to our discussion of communication in the sense of passing information from one individual to another.

Secrets are very important for an understanding of communication. Although for the epistemologist all knowledge is public in the sense that it is expressed in a public language or quasi language such as mathematical symbolism and can be publicly checked and verified from the social point of view a lot of knowledge is to a greater or lesser extent private or secret. Universities illustrate this matter very clearly. The knowledge in the library is socially public but the knowledge in the administrators' files is socially private. In one particular case at a

certain university when it was announced that a certain man had been promoted to a chair the administrators and some others knew that all his referees had advised against the appointment. The announcement of the appointment and of the professor's inaugural lecture and the lecture itself were all extremely public but the referees' advice was one of the administration's better kept secrets. At times even libraries may be involved in a certain amount of secrecy. The library at the Ministry of Defence may be an extreme case but even in university libraries one may encounter both formal and informal restrictions on access to books and other material. Generally these restrictions are concerned with the protection of rare and delicate books and manuscripts and so are not relevant to our purposes but even in a general academic library one may find that an unpublished PhD thesis for example is concerned with a socially sensitive area. Once I was given permission to read such a thesis about a legal organisation. The librarian who gave the permission was under the mistaken impression that I was a lawyer and when he discovered that he was mistaken he was slightly worried. There seemed to be some kind of tacit understanding between the library staff and the members of the organisation that if possible only lawyers would be allowed to read the thesis. It is possible to argue that a great deal of the secrecy in many societies is totally ludicrous and unnecessary. Evidently in some Scandinavian countries there is a great deal less official government secrecy than in countries such as Britain. But equally, it is very difficult if not impossible to imagine a society without any secrets at all. Even if it were desirable to publish all government papers it might not be desirable to publish all medical, legal and financial matters relating to individuals. Secrecy is also involved in allowing people to enjoy the rewards of industry and originality by means of patents and copyright. It can also be argued that in family life there is a

place for secrets between spouses, and between siblings and between parents and children. The interesting point about secrets as far as communication and roles are concerned is that they are role bound. One tells one's medical secrets to any doctor and one's financial secrets to any bank manager who is handling one's account. To say that information is secret is to say that it is restricted to people in certain roles. In bureaucratic organisations such as the civil service and the armed forces, it is usual to indicate the level or rank below which certain information cannot be passed. Such grading of information often takes no account of the handling of information by typists and photocopiers but the number of leaks of information through such people appears to be surprisingly few. Against the view that I have outlined it might be claimed that people often tell secrets to particular individuals because of their individual characteristics. In our society most married people have only one spouse and because of that situation belief in giving secrets to a particular individual as opposed to someone in a particular role may be widespread. But a man who has three wives one after the other rather than only one will probably be prepared to tell his third wife everything he told his first wife although when he was married to his first wife he probably thought that he was telling her secrets that he was not prepared to tell anyone else. In such a case we can say that a man is prepared to say certain things to his spouse whoever his spouse may be. Yet by its very nature in our society the relationship between a pair of spouses is regarded as totally exclusive and it is only when one member of the pair is replaced that the true nature of the situation is revealed. It would be absurd to deny that individuals can enter into special relationships whatever the role situation may be. The case of Queen Victoria and Mr John Brown illustrates that point admirably. In general however communication, including the communication of secrets,



is a role bound activity.

Perhaps it is now clear that roles have important physical and linguistic aspects. As we have tried to show in this chapter roles are not abstract entities which are discussed in sociology text books and which can be ignored by those who do not happen to be interested in sociology. In a very physical and obvious sense they surround us all the time and we see and hear them all day and every day. Somewhat paradoxically although the physical and linguistic aspects of roles are extremely obvious they are often ignored and many people do not seem to be aware of them. Many discussions of role theory do not even mention them. And so although what has been said in this chapter has been to a certain extent tedious and obvious it has at the same time been important. Indeed the matters we have looked at in this chapter are as important as the matters we discussed in chapter II despite the fact that in that chapter we were concerned with matters that are comparatively often discussed and have as it were a higher intellectual and academic status than the physical and linguistic aspect of roles.

The next two chapters give us some blessed relief from roles. But before we enjoy that relief it is necessary to say that we are not claiming to have mentioned every aspect of role theory. All we have tried to do in this section of the work (Chapters I - III) is to hint at the importance and complexity of roles in relation to understanding human action and behaviour. We shall return to that point in chapter VI.

## Chapter IV

### ANIMALS AND MACHINES

#### Section 1 - In General

Now it is time to turn to the individuals who occupy roles. This chapter and chapter V are together concerned with human individuals but the title 'human individuals' is restricted to chapter V. Here in this chapter we are concerned with animals and machines because a consideration of them helps to clarify our understanding of human beings. If one wishes to understand one type of entity it is often helpful to consider other types which may be regarded as similar or related to the type under consideration or as reasonably near neighbours of it. Those who are concerned with one form of transport may find it very helpful to consider other forms and those who study bacteria may also want to have some knowledge of viruses and so on. Precisely how great are the differences between animals and machines on the one hand and humans on the other will to a certain extent at any rate we hope emerge later in the chapter.

At this stage it may be necessary to try to provide some sort of justification of our choice of animals and machines as the most important objects of comparison with humans. It may be that on some distant planet there are beings which are much more like human beings than either animals or machines. Unfortunately this work was written before they were discovered by humans. As things stand at present animals and machines are the entities of all those known to man that are most like man himself. Religious people of various types are likely to regard that point of view as false and mistaken. For them some kinds of god or gods are the entities most like humans. And indeed some of them would go so far as to say that

one cannot understand man without understanding these in some sense metaphysical or supernatural beings. Those who regard man as some kind of creature are apt to say that he can be understood only by reference to his creator. Some religious people may wish to say that man has an immortal and metaphysical soul which is the most important part of him and that therefore if we wish to understand man we must study the general field of metaphysical entities.

Since this work is written from a general empiricist point of view these religious points of view are not accepted. It is beyond the scope of this work to give a general defence of empiricism and a general refutation of the claims of traditional metaphysics. We may however digress very briefly into the philosophy of religion in order to deal with a point of view which claims to support the idea of the existence of a creator god without recourse to arguments for the existence of such a being. Almost certainly the best explanations of that point of view are to be found in the writings of the theologian Karl Barth. In his paper 'The Rationality of Discipleship' Barth writes (Fragments Grave and Gay by Karl Barth p 43).

Any god postulated or dreamt up by man, even the loftiest and most impressive, is alien to the Christain faith and can only be repudiated by it as a non-god.

The God professed by the Christain faith differs from all other gods in that, without assuming any ability or willingness on man's part, but as a free act of grace, he announced himself, to man's deep wonderment, as his Lord, Creator, Redeemer and Father, calling him only to responsibility. And thus the Christain faith, aloof from all spirit of metaphysical enterprise, is merely this responsibility, this free acknowledgment of the self-announcement of God's being and existence, his act and word; free thanks to the liberation that man experiences as a result of the self-announcement of the free God. This and this alone orders, fills and forms ever anew human propositions and ideas about the Christain profession of faith.



In order to deal with this point let us imagine two groups of people. The members of the first group believe that they can prove the existence of god and the members of the second group believe that god has announced or revealed himself to them. The sceptics approached to each group is bound to be the same. In each case he will want to know what reasons there are to substantiate the claim in question. He will expect the members of the first group to produce their reasons for thinking that they have proved the existence of god and he will expect the members of the second group to produce their reasons for thinking that god has announced or revealed himself to them. If the members of the second group try to avoid the issue by saying that human reason cannot be trusted because it is fallen then the sceptic will ask them for their reasons for saying that human reason is fallen or imperfect or unreliable. And indeed the sceptic may tell the man who says that human reason is fallen that he is trapped by the liar paradox. Just as we do not know whether or not to believe the Cretan who says that all Cretans are liars so we do not know whether or not to take seriously the claim that human reason, is fallen since that claim is as it were advanced by human reason and is presumably intended by those who advance it to be rational. It is in other words impossible to escape from the difficulties of reason and argument to a safe and secure world of revelation. Any attempt to say that revelation can only be experienced and not argued for is itself an argument. In the case of what is called Christian revelation the disbelief of the Jews is at least as important and one might almost say as damning as the disbelief of atheists and sceptics.

One digression levels to another and so it should be said that the paper by Prof Max Bense to which Barth's paper is a reply deserves to be studied as a fascinating curiosity of continental philosophy despite the presence of what are almost certainly serious errors of translation

one of which does not appear to be

'Thus the vital good in theoretical explanation seems to me to be the spiritual purity of atheism, and this requires the use of a philosophical language, since in the last analysis only that can do justice to that spiritual purity'

Even the strangeness of that sentence however cannot compete with the incredible information supplied by the editor of the book at the beginning of the article where we read (Barth op cit p 32).

'In 1963 Professor Max Bense was finally appointed to a chair of philosophy at Stuttgart after the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Baden-Wurttemberg had refused the appointment in 1961 on the ground that a declared atheist could not be appointed to a chair of philosophy at a German university'.

Now we must return at once to our subject and say that at this stage our reasons for selecting animals and machines as the most appropriate entities with which to compare human beings are negative in the sense that no better candidates in whose existence there are satisfactory grounds for belief have yet appeared on the scene. As one says that one must be aware that to-morrow one may wake up and find standing at the bottom of one's bed an entity from another planet that has at least as good a claim to be compared with human beings as animals and machines have. The positive reasons for the selection in the sense of the existence of important similarities amongst animals, machines and human beings will it is hoped emerge during the rest of the chapter.

If we ask what animals and machines are it is possible to answer the question very simply by saying that they are entities which are inferior to human beings. This is an extremely anthropocentric view. It might be that visitors from another planet would regard animals and machines as being generally superior to humans but it is equally probable

that they might come to agree with the anthropocentric view. There are reasons for the anthropocentric view and they are worth examination. Both animals and machines are generally regarded as intellectually inferior to people. The problem solving behaviour of animals can be regarded as inferior to that of people. Human beings are able to solve more complicated problems than animals can. The intellectual capacities of certain types of machine have improved and are improving greatly at the present time and more will be said about them in the next section, but there is still possibly a sense in which machines are intellectually inferior to people. The intellectual powers of people are to a large extent a function of their ability to use language and similar systems such as mathematical symbolism and musical notation. There are not yet machines which can use these systems to the extent and with the sophistication that the most able people can. It has long been acknowledged however that animals and machines are very often physically superior to people. Probably all human physical capacities are inferior to the corresponding capacities of some machines and some animals. There are machines and animals which can move faster and carry greater loads and so on than human beings. But humans have a unique combination of abilities. One can see this if one considers the abilities required for such distinctively human activities, as drawing, painting, ballet dancing eye and brain surgery, singing and playing musical instruments. These activities require a very high degree of muscular co-ordination and control used in conjunction with and controlled by appropriate perceptual, intellectual, artistic and emotional skills. Even such activities as writing, dental surgery, speaking and chiropody also require similar skills although not at the same level. In this context we are talking about writing and speaking as purely physical activities. They can be seen in this light in situations such as the copying of a manuscript written in a language which the



copyist does not understand and the reading aloud of a phonetic transcription of a passage in a language which the speaker does not understand. If we turn to the field of sensory discrimination we find a similar type of situation. There are animals which can hear sounds which are inaudible to humans and there are animals which can see in the dark. Also the insect eye gives a type of all round vision which humans might find useful. But humans have powers of visual and auditory discrimination which cannot be found in the animal world. As far as we know there is no animal which has perfect pitch. It is important to note however that just as the most sophisticated human muscular skills are closely linked with other skills so the most sophisticated human perceptual skills are linked with artistic skills and aesthetic judgment.

The considerable physical powers of animals and machines are used by human beings to supplement or replace their own lesser physical abilities. And that is just one instance of the general use made of animals and machines by humans. Part of the inferiority of animals and machines is in the fact that they are used by humans and in the case of machines produced by them. Vast numbers of animals are not in any sense used by people but all animals are potentially available for human use. It is also true that in a sense animals can be produced by humans who either provide suitable conditions for their breeding or actively promote it by artificial insemination. There is truth in the view that humans are masters of both animals and machines. But there is another side to the picture. In certain situations people can be destroyed by either animals or machines. And situations in which people control animals or machines can often turn into situations in which people are dependent on them. Failure in machines which convey people can have serious consequences and people are also dependent on machines of biological significance such as iron lungs, artificial kidneys and cardiac stimulators and pace

makers which are placed inside the thorax. Certainly people are ultimately in control of all machines which are incapable of the most complex forms of learning since they designed and produced them but even that point cannot stand without qualification since even the most careful design and production cannot remove the need for the testing of prototypes or trial runs or test flights. The behaviour even of machines incapable of learning does not seem to be totally predictable from a knowledge of their design and production.

So far we have classed animals and machines more or less together but it is time to start paying attention to their differences. The most obvious difference is that animals are biological and machines are non-biological. That means that they differ both as regards chemical structure and mode of operation. Animals like all biological organisms are cellular in structure and their mode of functioning is basically an elaboration of the functioning of a unicellular or acellular organism like Ameoba. Machines on the other hand are organised on mechanical or electronic principles and do not have such biological features as cells, enzymes and the ability to respond to many types of visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile stimuli from their environment. In addition they have powers of learning and remembering and they can indulge in problem solving activities. Machines are possibly not yet as homeostatic or as responsive to such a wide range of stimuli as mammals. And they cannot as yet reproduce. But there is no reason in principle why they should not be developed in such a way that will have these properties in due course. Another difference between animals and machines is that all animals produce their own energy and so they can be highly mobile if they have appropriate locomotive structures. In general machines other than locomotive machines such as aeroplanes tend to be relatively static and tend to draw energy from a distant source which also supplies other machines as well. But in this respect as in

others there is no reason why animal-like machines should not be developed. The flexibility and highly adaptive nature of animal behaviour stands out in sharp contrast to the very specialised behaviour of machines. A beaver can cut through tree trunks but an electric saw can do it much more efficiently. Similarly the other abilities of beavers can be surpassed by other machines. Multipurpose machines may not be in great demand. One of the most noticeable features of animals is what biologists call their life cycle i.e. progression from birth to death through stages of growth, development and aging. Evidently there are two theories of aging, the biological and the pathological. According to the biological theory dying is the last stage of development and according to the pathological theory it is a disease which could in theory be prevented or cured. At present it is not clear which theory is true. If the pathological theory turns out to be true and there is no theoretical reason why aging should not be stopped then in one respect animals and machines will become more like each other. Certainly machines wear out and they also collapse because of metal fatigue. Only an expert in both biology and engineering could say to what extent the disintegration of machines and the aging of biological organisms do or do not resemble each other. At present almost all parts of all machines can be replaced as they become worn out and transplant surgery is just beginning to make this process a possibility for biological organisms. If the pathological theory is true presumably one day we shall be able to arrange things so that not even the parts of organisms will age and so as far as longevity is concerned organisms may at some stage be superior to machines. If the biological theory is true an important difference between animals and machines remains unless we can indulge in some very complicated genetic engineering because according to it the progression from birth to death is a continuous process of change going through various phases. Presumably it would be possible



to produce some kind of metal or other material which would never disintegrate or at least would not be liable to suffer from metal fatigue as we know it.

## Section II - The Intellectual Capabilities of Animals and Machines

Recently there has been a dramatic change in the intellectual capacity of machines. Computers and similar machines now have powers of memory and calculation which greatly surpass those of human beings. But machines remain intellectually inferior to humans because they cannot yet make use of languages and similar systems which are as complex as those used by humans. There are machine languages in use at the present time and it might seem reasonable to suppose that in due course machines will be devised which will be capable of coping with human languages. One well known person who has argued against this view is Professor N Chomsky. Before giving some attention to his writings we can say at present that Chomsky argues that the whole attempt to teach machines human language is misconceived because the ability to learn language is peculiarly human and is at least partly genetic and inherited. Evidently Chomsky claims that human languages are not as dissimilar and diverse as they first appear because there are certain basic and deep and as opposed to surface structures which are common to all human languages. These basic features are held to relate to important features of the human nervous system or, in the view of the metaphysically inclined, of the human mind. For those who are not metaphysically inclined there is no particular problem here. If the structure of language learning machines has to be modelled on that of the human nervous system no doubt in time it will be possible to produce such machines.

A brief statement of Chomsky's views can be found in his paper

Recent Contributions to the Theory of Innate Ideas which is printed in The Ecology of Human Intelligence edited by Professor L Hudson. It is useful to consider this paper before one goes on to discuss the arguments presented in Chomsky's book Language and Mind. From the philosophical point of view there are two main points in the paper. The first of these (Hudson p 81) is that 'Compared with the number of sentences that a child can produce or interpret with ease, the number of seconds in a lifetime is ridiculously small. Hence the data available as input is only a minute sample of the linguistic material that has been thoroughly mastered, as indicated by actual performance.' And a few lines further on in the paper Chomsky writes 'The sentences used in everyday discourse are not 'familiar sentences' or generalisations of familiar sentences in terms of any known process of generalisation. In fact even to speak of familiar sentences is an absurdity'. All that Chomsky gives us at this point is assertion and what he asserts is somewhat implausible and would require a vast amount of empirical investigation and evidence to support it. One would imagine that the number of types of sentence used in everyday discourse must be minute in comparison with the number of sentences used. Only a vast amount of empirical evidence could reasonably persuade one otherwise. Many conversational exchanges at the small talk level are very limited and are almost ritualistic. It is not particularly difficult to master the types of sentences used in such exchanges. Chomsky thinks that he strengthens his case when he says between the two passages already quoted from his paper that 'We observe further that the tremendous intellectual accomplishment of language acquisition is carried out at a period of life when the child is capable of little else and that this task is entirely beyond the capacities of an otherwise intelligent ape'. There are three main objections to that statement. A person's mastery of his native language can go on improving until his dying day. This is particularly

true of people who devote themselves to vaguely academic or intellectual pursuits such as law, politics or journalism or to very definitely academic and intellectual pursuits such as philosophy and sociology. For such people higher education can lead to a considerable increase in linguistic competence. The undergraduate in philosophy for example usually learns the various meanings of the common word 'is' either through reading certain of Plato's dialogues or through studying logic or both. Very probably he has not understood the meanings of the word at an earlier stage although he has most certainly used it on innumerable occasions. It might be objected that I am exaggerating my case but my exaggeration is no worse than Chomsky's. Presumably in the passage under discussion Chomsky is really talking about what is colloquially called 'learning to speak' which is really very different from 'language acquisition'. But the so called 'learning to speak' is really only a matter of beginning to learn to speak. Language acquisition does or should include reading and writing which are activities that the child normally begins to master at a stage when he is capable of doing quite a few other things. When children, as we say, learn to speak they possibly cannot do very much else because of lack of muscular strength and co-ordination but it really does not particularly matter. Clearly a lot depends on what one means by language acquisition and knowledge of a language. An anonymous friend of a philosopher I know put forward the view in a private communication that 'learning to read and write are forms of language activity but are hardly necessary in language acquisition, as illiteracy is quite compatible with knowledge of a language'. There are no good reasons for accepting that point of view. If a language has a written form then those who cannot read and write the language in question have only a partial knowledge of it if they can speak it. In the case of dead languages the possibility of speaking



the language does not arise but they are languages and those who can read and write them are rightly said to know them. Equally there are languages which do not yet have a written form and so knowing them is simply a matter of being able to speak them. Those who wish to claim to know living languages which have a written form must be able to cope with both the written and spoken forms of the languages

The point about apes has now been shown to be simply false. Apes cannot speak and they cannot write but there is a very limited amount of experimental evidence to show that they can use and understand language if it is presented in the form of visual symbols for words. Evidently if they are presented with questions in such symbol languages they can compose correct replies to the questions. The situation has been well described by Drs Claire and W M S Russell in their paper Language and animal signals where they write in Linguistics at Large edited by N Minnis p 183-185.

The real test is whether chimpanzees can be taught to use human words themselves, and to combine them in appropriate ways. A very intensive attempt to teach a chimpanzee to talk was made some years ago by a married couple, both scientists, K J and Cathy Hayes. They adopted a baby chimp called Viki, and brought her up in their house exactly as if she were a human child, but using in addition the most sophisticated methods of teaching available. The result was disappointing. After six years of great effort and ingenuity, Viki had learned to utter only four sounds resembling English words. From this and other studies, it looked as if chimpanzees cannot be taught a human language.

So matters stood until June 1966, when another scientist couple, R A and Beatrice T Gardner, began work at the University of Nevada with a female chimpanzee between eight and fourteen months old, whom they named Washoe after the county where the University is situated. Benefiting from the Hayes' experience, the Gardners had had an imaginative new idea. We have seen that most monkeys rely more on visual than on vocal signals. Even the actual vocal apparatus of chimpanzees is very different from man's. So instead of trying to teach spoken English, the Gardners decided to teach Washoe American Sign Language, as used by the deaf in North America, in which English words or concepts are represented by signs made with the hands; some of these symbols are representational, others arbitrary, and all can be combined according to principles of

English grammar and syntax. The Gardners and their colleagues bought up Washoe in shifts so that she never lacked for affectionate human company. They played all sorts of games with her and seem to have given her a very good time. All the time they were chattering among themselves in Sign Language, for it is known that simply being exposed to adults talking helps human children to learn to talk. They encouraged Washoe to imitate them, prompted her to get a sign right by repeating it themselves or by placing her hands in the right position, introduced plenty of toys and other objects to increase her vocabulary, encouraged her to 'babble' with her hands, as a child does with his voice, and rewarded her for correct usage by tickling her, which she greatly enjoyed.

The results of all this were as follows. After twenty-two months of teaching, Washoe could use thirty-four words correctly in the appropriate circumstances. (She was only counted as knowing a word if three observers independently saw her use it correctly and without prompting.) Whenever Washoe learned a new word, she very soon and quite spontaneously transferred it from a particular object, such as the key of a cupboard, to a whole class of objects, such as all keys. She would spontaneously call the humans' attention to objects by making the correct signs. She used the sign for 'dog' when she saw a picture of a dog or even heard a dog bark without seeing it; evidently, like the dolphins, she had the capacity, previously supposed to be unique to man, of transposing patterns from one sense to another.

All this is remarkable, but Washoe did more. Without any prompting and apparently quite spontaneously, as soon as she had about ten signs in her repertoire, Washoe began to invent combinations of signs and use them in a perfectly appropriate way. Among combinations which she invented are: open food drink, for opening the refrigerator; go sweet, for being carried to a raspberry bush; open flower, to be let through the gate into a flower garden, and listen eat, at the sound of an alarm clock signalling meal-time. Just before the Gardners published their first results (in August 1969). Washoe had learned the pronouns I -me and you, 'so that combinations that resemble short sentences have begun to appear'. It only remains to add that Washoe's learning was accelerating - she had learned four signs in the first seven months, nine in the next, and twenty-one in the last seven months.

Since Washoe unmistakably combines and recombines signs to describe objects and situations new to her in perfectly appropriate ways, this wonderful experiment seems to have established beyond doubt that a chimpanzee is capable of learning true language. True, at three years of age, she only has thirty-four words; at the equivalent age in terms of development, namely five years old, the average human child has a vocabulary of hundreds of words and makes sentences averaging 4.6 words in length. Sheer numerical differences of this kind may be important for the potentialities of human language. But the Gardners' achievement remains epoch-making. An animal has been taught to use true language, to communicate with human teachers.

Naturally it is to be hoped that Washoe will continue with her

studies of English and it is also to be hoped that many other animals will follow her example. But the important point is that Washoe has destroyed Chomsky's position and no amount of talk of deep and surface structures and types of grammar can save it. Washoe has shown both that an animal can learn a language or at least one aspect of it and that there is nothing fundamental about the spoken as opposed to the written forms of language because he has acquired a very rudimentary knowledge of a form of the written or at least visual as opposed to auditory form of the language without first learning to speak. It should not be necessary to make this point since what Washoe has done with English is done to a certain extent by school boys who learn any dead language such as Latin. The idea that the spoken or auditory form or aspect of language is more fundamental than its written or visual form or aspect may be widespread simply because children learn to speak before they learn to write. Possibly this happens simply because their vocal organs develop more quickly than the strength and co-ordination of the muscles used in writing. The situation may however change if children are taught the visual form and aspect of language in the way that Washoe was taught it.

In accordance with what we said above we cannot claim that Washoe is in the full sense of the term a language user because she does not appear to be able to use the auditory aspect and form of language. Presumably her deficiencies are entirely vocal and not at all aural. It has often been said that no animal has anything like the human vocal apparatus which is not restricted to the larynx but also includes the mouth, nose, pharynx and certain sinuses in the skull and may indeed be regarded as also including the thorax, diaphragm and certain muscles in the abdomen. In principle however it is possible that animals could cope with the auditory aspect of language if they could be taught to use an appropriate machine which could produce the sounds which because of their



anatomical structure they cannot produce. Only a very complicated machine could produce the exact equivalent of the vocal capabilities of people which include inflection and tone as well as simply vowel and consonant sounds. But if necessary we could settle for something less than normal human vocal capacity as we do in the case of those people who suffer from either surgical or traumatic removal of the larynx and have to be content with either a mechanical larynx or oesophagal speech.

At the end of the paper (Hudson op cit pp 87-88) Chomsky quotes a passage from Descartes, part of which runs as follows:

But because we already possess within us the idea of a true triangle we, therefore, when we see the composite figure, apprehend not it itself but rather an authentic triangle.

Chomsky's comment on this passage is 'It seems to me that the conclusions regarding the nature of language acquisition discussed above, are fully in accord with the doctrine of innate ideas, so understood, and can be regarded as providing a kind of substantiation and further development of this doctrine'. It is probably best to regard the passage from Descartes as simply false. Many children take quite some time to grasp the Euclidean idea of a triangle simply because it is so different from the actual triangles they have met in the physical world. In any event only the philosophically ignorant can speak as if the traditional controversy between the rationalists and the empiricists had not been profoundly altered by Kant. We cannot now say that knowledge comes from either mind or experience but only from, in the traditional language, the interaction of mind and experience. If we do wish to revive a traditional empiricist or rationalist point of view we must first show that Kant's objections to the traditional positions are unsound. Immediately after quoting the passage from Descartes he states simply and without qualification 'In

this sense the idea of triangle is innate'. Such confident philosophical simple mindedness is really quite alarming.

It is time now to turn to Chomsky's book 'Language and Mind' which like his paper mentioned above is filled with support for Descartes and his followers and so on p 7 we read 'I think it is correct to say that the study of the properties and organisation of mind was prematurely abandoned'. Neither at that point nor at any other is there any hint that the concept of mind raises immense problems. The work of Professor Ryle is not mentioned. One should not however be surprised to find philosophical confusion in the work of a writer who says later on p 69 'It would be mere dogmatism to maintain without argument or evidence that the mind is simpler in its innate structure than other biological systems'. Several of the points in 'Language and Mind' are similar to those in the paper that we have already discussed but since Chomsky makes so much of them it may be a good idea to look at them again. On p 10 he writes 'much of what we say in the course of normal language use is entirely new, not a repetition of anything that we have heard before and not even similar in any useful sense of the term - 'similar' and 'pattern' to sentences or discourse that we have heard in the past'. This is a truism'. The falsity of this view is really quite surprising. Most language both written and spoken is filled with endless echoes of what people other than the writer or speaker in question have written and said. Any examiner knows that. There is an important sense in which the works mentioned in the bibliography of a PhD thesis echo and reverberate throughout the thesis. Bureaucrats soon learn that certain official documents are supposed to be written in an allegedly appropriate official style and part of their skill lies in being able to produce that style. <sup>Once</sup> Once as a university administrator I had to consult a certain professor about the drafting of some regulation or other. As we struggled to produce a

satisfactory form of words the professor remarked how strange it was that in such a situation one soon found oneself using the ghastly language of the university regulations. At the level of literature the critic the literary historian and the author are all well aware of echoes and resemblances. And so one can talk of the influence of Ovid on Chaucer and of the Bible on Milton. T S Eliot's notes on The Waste Land are a useful study in literary influences. At one point, line 441, he draws our attention both to Dante's Inferno XXXIII, 46 and to F H Bradley's Appearance and Reality p 346. One can also mention the patterns in language such as 'if p then q' which logicians study. But the most important objection to Chomsky's view is that without patterns and resemblances in what different people write and say the idea of a public language would collapse and we would be left with a collection of so called private languages. If Chomsky overstates his case I must be careful not to overstate mine. There may indeed be an element of novelty in everyone's use of language and Chomsky's is right to draw our attention to that aspect of linguistic behaviour. But unless one is a James Joyce the novelty is almost totally obscured by the conventionality. One may of course say new things without much if any linguistic novelty. Highly original works in any field may open up vast new horizons in the most conventional of language. We have already noticed that linguistic behaviour is role bound. Chomsky challenges that idea when he says p 11 'But the normal use of language is not only innovative and potentially infinite in scope but also free from the control of detectable stimuli either external or internal'. A few lines later on he says that linguistic appropriateness to the situation is 'an entirely different matter from control by external stimuli'. Unless one defines external stimuli in a needlessly narrow way that statement is simply false. Normally linguistic behaviour is a response not in a mechanical but in



a social sense to the linguistic behaviour of others and the whole linguistic interaction is governed by the appropriate roles.

It is interesting to compare two views of his basic thesis that Chomsky gives us. The first of these is perfectly reasonable and has much to commend it, the second is very different. The first view is given on p 69 of Language and Mind when he writes 'As participants in a certain culture, we are naturally aware of the great differences in ability to use language, in knowledge of vocabulary, and so on that result from differences in native ability and from differences of acquisition, we naturally pay much less attention to the similarities and to common knowledge, which we take for granted. We find that the similarities that we take for granted are quite marked and that the divergences are few and marginal. Furthermore we discover a substantial system of principles that do not vary even among languages that are, as far as we know entirely unrelated.' Provided there is sufficient empirical evidence to back up that point of view it is entirely reasonable. Indeed it would not be at all surprising if it turned out that at some kind of deep as opposed to surface level all languages are fundamentally the same because they all carry out the same fundamental task of being instruments and vehicles of human communication. In saying that and in agreeing with Chomsky at this point we are not saying anything about nor agreeing with Chomsky about the idea that linguistic knowledge or competence is innate. Although it may well be the case that current learning theory is unable to give a satisfactory explanation of language acquisition it does not follow that the whole idea of language learning should be discarded. It is reasonable to wait a considerable time to see if learning theory can be modified or altered in such a way that it can cope with what is presumably its greatest and most complicated problem. On p 78 Chomsky turns to his idea of innate linguistic ability and expresses it

in a clear and extreme form. He writes 'The child cannot know at birth which language he is to learn, but he must know that its grammar must be of a predetermined form that excludes many imaginable languages. Having selected a permissible hypothesis he can use inductive evidence for corrective action, confirming or disconfirming his choice. Once the hypothesis is sufficiently well confirmed, the child knows the language defined by this hypothesis; consequently, his knowledge extends enormously beyond his experience and in fact, leads him to characterize much of the data of experience as defective and deviant'. The idea of a child knowing anything at birth raises many problems and requires much more elucidation which Chomsky does not supply. Most knowledge is dependent on actual linguistic ability. Even a claim to know how to do x as opposed to knowing that x is normally expressed in language and then substantiated by action which may be wholly or partially non linguistic. The child Chomsky talks about is truly remarkable for not only does he know something at birth but he also at an early stage selects an hypothesis and uses inductive evidence. Very carefully controlled experiments would be required to establish the idea that children are able to characterize much of the data of linguistic experience as defective and deviant and have a knowledge of language extending enormously beyond their experience. Many parents and teachers must wish that Chomsky's ideas were true because they have to spend quite a lot of time correcting the linguistic habits which children appear to pick up quite uncritically through their experience.

Once or twice I have hinted darkly that Chomsky's enthusiasm for rationalism can be criticised on the grounds that it does not take adequate account of Kantian philosophy. There are two oblique references to Kant on pages 78 and 81 but they are not really very significant. But on pages 24 and 53 Chomsky raises Kantian questions without apparently

being aware that they were Kantian. On p 24 he writes 'The study of universal grammar is the study of the nature of human intellectual capacities. It tries to formulate the necessary and sufficient conditions that a system must meet to qualify as a potential human language, conditions (which) constitute the innate organization that determines what counts as linguistic experience and what knowledge of language arises on the basis of this experience'. The first of these sentences is the more important of the two. If universal grammar is what Chomsky says it is in that sentence then it was first expounded by Kant and Chomsky must really discuss his own ideas in relation to those of Kant. Such a task would be quite difficult and involved as well as very illuminating. Matters are even more Kantian on p 53 where Chomsky writes '..... it seems not unlikely that continued research will bring to light a highly restrictive schematism that determines both the content of experience and the nature of the knowledge that arises from it .....'. This can be elucidated only in the context of a Kantian discussion. A 'highly restrictive schematism' is more likely to determine the form than the content of experience because it is to be hoped that the objective physical world is at least partly responsible for determining the content of experience. At this point Chomsky has once again touched on vast philosophical problems which really cannot be avoided.

In passing it is difficult to ignore how strange two of the examples designed to show the difference between deep and surface structure appear to be. On p 27 of Language and Mind Chomsky writes 'One major problem is posed by the fact that the surface structure generally gives very little indication in itself of the meaning of the sentence. There are, for example, numerous sentences that are ambiguous in some way that is not indicated by the surface structure. A few lines later on he writes 'Thus the sentence 'I disapprove of John's cooking' may imply either that



I think his wife should cook or that I think he uses too much garlic, for example'. My use of English may be totally eccentric but it seems to me that the sentence 'I disapprove of John's cooking' means that I don't like what he cooks and the quite different sentence 'I disapprove of John cooking' means that I don't like the fact that he cooks. As it happens I checked this matter with handful of university graduates in different subjects and of different universities and they seemed to agree with me. One philosopher with whom I discussed the matter said that although he felt that my point of view was sound as far as colloquial usage was concerned it was completely false as far as correct and grammatical English was concerned and that Chomsky was right as far as correct and grammatical English was concerned. Presumably contemporary linguists would not want to claim that philosopher as their friend since they are rightly extremely critical of the traditional ideas about correct and grammatical English which he supports. On page 28 Chomsky writes 'Other examples can be found where a similar principle seems to be at work. Thus, consider sentence 10 which is presumably derived from either 11 or 12 and is therefore ambiguous.

- |    |                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------|
| 10 | I know a taller man than Bill.      |
| 11 | I know a taller man than Bill does. |
| 12 | I know a taller man than Bill is.   |

It seems clear that the ambiguity of 10 is not represented in the surface structure; and the deletion of 'does' in 11 leaves exactly the same structure as the deletion of 'is' in 12'. Here I would want to claim that the sentence 'I know a taller man than Bill' means that I know someone who is taller than Bill and has nothing to do with the quite different sentence 'I know a man who is taller than anyone Bill knows'.

At the very best it seems to me that these examples of Chomsky's are extremely doubtful and unfortunate. Possibly only the demands of a theory would make one want to find more ambiguities in everyday language than in fact there are.

In general we may conclude that Chomsky does not give us any good reasons for thinking that there could not in theory be a machine capable of learning and using language. The design of such a machine might very well owe a great deal to the structure of the human nervous system in the sense that the machine might in many ways be a copy or analogue of that system. It might be as well to consider what particular abilities a machine capable of using human language would require. All the aspects of what psychologists call cognition would be required e.g. perception, learning and remembering. In addition the ability to produce and understand both written and spoken language would obviously be necessary. All language users must be able to explore and manipulate their environments. Words are related to things and in order to understand certain words perception of things at a distance is not sufficient. Although words like 'hard', 'soft', 'sticky', 'prickly' and 'slimy' can perhaps be understood to a certain extent as simply properties of things without actual physical contact of the human type with things yet they are much better and more easily understood with such contact. There is no reason in principle why a cognitive machine capable of speaking, writing and exploring and manipulating its environment should not be produced. The idea that a machine could perceive may raise difficulties for many people. The difficulties are presumably either biological or metaphysical. One can say that perception is either produced by or associated with either biological or metaphysical entities or processes. The idea that it could be produced by or associated with e.g. electronic entities or processes may seem strange but mere strangeness is really the only point that can

be held against it. The difficulties that are raised by the idea are no doubt immense but so are the difficulties raised by either biological or metaphysical theories of perception. It would be difficult to show that the possibility of perception either produced by or associated with e.g. electronic entities or processes raises greater difficulties than these theories. In saying that one is not denying the obvious fact that at present all known cases of perception must be explained on either biological or metaphysical grounds and not on e.g. electronic grounds.

Before we leave Chomsky's work it might be advisable to make perfectly clear the nature of our interest in it since Chomsky is such an important and in some quarters such a revered figure at the present time. We have discussed Chomsky's work en passant because at the present time he is the most famous exponent of the view that language is distinctively human in the sense that he thinks that language using machines and animals are impossible. Clearly in the course of our discussion that view could not be ignored but it must be emphasised that the view itself is our primary concern and not the fact that Chomsky holds it and equally not his particular reasons for holding it. We have referred to his work simply because of the historical accident that he is the most famous exponent of the view at the present time. But the view is in fact such an unsound one that it is possible to argue against it as we have done without reference to anyone's particular reasons for holding it. Chomsky's reasons are concerned with his ideas about the deep and surface structure of language and with his ideas about grammar. There are however many other possible reasons for holding the view. Some people might wish to argue that language is in some way related to a metaphysical mind or to a metaphysical soul or that it is the special gift of a creator god to his special creature man. Such reasons are perhaps unlikely to be common at the present time but they are certainly



possible even if they are totally unsound. Reasons for holding the view are not our concern and are much less important than the view itself. Obviously anyone who is interested in Chomsky's work for its own sake must pay detailed attention to his linguistic theory in relation to that view. Chomsky's work is not basically a concern of ours. At the same time it is very difficult in the context of a philosophical discussion to avoid commenting on the Cartesian and Kantian aspects of his work and so we have made a few remarks on these topics. Now we must return to our main discussion relating to animals and machines.

At this stage it may be advisable to consider the current state of machine development in the field which is relevant to our discussion.

One 6th June 1973 The Times reported that :-

'A robot called Fred, born and tutored at Edinburgh University, is this week demonstrating its ability to put together toy cars and ships on a laboratory table.

What Fred does is to look at a heap of objects, sort them into pieces it recognizes, and assemble the pieces into the appropriate object, such as a toy car.

Fred is a sort of prodigy among robots, mainly because of his versatility. This springs from the cleverness of the computer programme written by the Edinburgh team.

The group is led by Professor Donald Michie, head of the department of machine intelligence at the university. He says the overall objective is to improve the arts of programming to incorporate into computing systems some of the features of human teachability.

Having proved that Edinburgh has gone some way towards combining the accuracy of a machine with the teachability of say a three-year old child.

Clearly machines are advancing in the direction in which we want them to go as it were if they are capable of genuine learning and are genuinely capable of being taught. Human beings however can not only learn, they can also direct their own learning in the sense of acquiring

and following up interests. They can decide to follow things up and to pursue lines of enquiry. And only when machine learning also exhibits these features will it be able to be considered equal to human learning. When there is a machine which is genuinely capable of learning in the full human sense of the term its behaviour will be completely beyond the control and prediction of its designers and makers. In my undergraduate days discussions about the possibility of machines being beyond the control and predictions of their designers and makers seemed to be exclusively concerned with the idea that it would be necessary to produce a machine whose behaviour was totally random in order to achieve that possibility. If one is concerned with the idea of machines attaining human status the possibility of genuine learning by machines is very important but the possibility of producing a machine whose behaviour is totally random is not.

Here it would be advisable to note with interest and approval the views of the psychologist Dr D E Broadbent who writes in his book In Defence of Empirical Psychology (p 192)

If I am going to urge a rather different point of view, perhaps I should first make clear my attitude to this one. First, I regard the attempts to describe grammar in these terms as a great intellectual achievement, and am very conscious that most people working in this area are more intelligent than I am. Indeed, it seems to me that only a person of quite outstanding natural intelligence could possibly sustain the idea that the structure of the world is already present schematically in our minds in advance of experience, merely requiring to be realized and differentiated. Some of us have only too much experience from day to day of discovering that the world does not conform to the structure which we thought it to have. The descriptions of linguistic structure which have been produced following the example of Chomsky seem to me to be an enormous step forward, which I do not hesitate to compare with the advances introduced by Euclid into geometry.

But the analogy is chosen deliberately, because Euclidean geometry is an abstract system relating a large number of mathematical truths and deriving from a few axioms. It does not, however, have any necessary empirical content: if two people set out from the

equator on parallel courses towards the north, and rely on the empirical truth of Euclid, they will get a nasty shock when their paths cross at the North Pole. Similarly, I regard the transformationalist account of the structure of a language as quite abstract and separate from the actual organization of that language as a natural phenomenon.

And later on in the same book he writes (pp 205 - 206)

A further interesting question is raised by our own superiority over animals: perhaps the superiority might be in the ability to form classes of classes recursively to a higher degree than animals, or perhaps as Morton (1969b) suggests in the ability to hold in store a relationship conflicting with present experience. These valuable endowments of procedure and mechanisms of learning may give us an advantage over animals. But a proper respect for the complexity even of animal learning suggests that there is no need to suppose an innate endowment of linguistic structure.

In general, therefore, I cannot support the idea that the amount of information which a child receives in sentences spoken by its mother and other adults is too small to allow grammar to be learned by an empirical process. On the contrary, there is direct evidence from learning experiments that the ability to construct sentences can be acquired from methods of training organized on the assumption that the sequence of classes of utterance is acquired empirically. I have also given you reasons for thinking that a transformational account of language is not sufficient in the other sense of empirically. Of course I hope I have made it quite clear that I find such a grammar a useful description of the structure of utterances, provided that it is not taken as an indication of the way those utterances are produced or understood. In visual experiments, we should be hard put to study perception without having geometric descriptions of circles and parallel lines: even though these descriptions bear little relation to events within the nervous system. Furthermore, I cannot possibly claim to have defeated Chomsky's dictum that specific empiricist theories are refutable, because I find I cannot be specific at a number of crucial points.

One must, however, compare the empiricist view with its opponents, rather than find fault with it in isolation. If we say merely that the structure of certain behaviour is, in some general way, built into the brain I find this also lacking as a specific explanation. I think therefore that I would regard empiricist views of the kind I have been putting forward as more satisfactory than any alternatives, until some indication is given at least of the elements of the universal grammar which are supposed to be innate, and preferably of the ways and the stages in which these elements are incorporated into the processing of information in the nervous system. I am not asking for a wiring diagram of the brain, but merely for a flow chart with the innate portions indicated. In the absence of such suggestions, the empiricist case seems to me better made than the idealist one.



In general we can say that there are no sound reasons for supporting the idea that the ability to use language is necessarily confined to human beings and can never be found in machines and animals. It should be noted however that as soon as machines and animals have a considerable number of so called essentially human characteristics such as the ability to use language they cease to be and to be reasonably called animals and machines because as we have seen part of the meaning of the term 'animal' and 'machine' is 'sub-human'.

### Section 3 - The Social Significance of Animals and Machines

From the social point of view animals range from pests and vermin to pets and sacred animals. Pests and vermin are animals which threaten human health and survival and so must be destroyed. At the other extreme pets are animals which are cherished by humans and medical and other skills are used to ensure their survival and promote their welfare. Sacred animals are an exceptional but philosophically interesting case. We started the chapter by saying that animals and machines are entities which are inferior to human beings and we noted that this is an anthropocentric view. In general these points are sound but sacred animals are an exception to them. Those people who believe that certain animals are sacred must believe that these animals are of greater value and worth than human beings including themselves because for those who believe in it the holy or the sacred is the highest possible category of value. Belief in such a category of value in conjunction with theism produces such statements as 'Better is thy love than life' which to the atheist and disbeliever in the holy is almost obscenely immoral. It is interesting to note that the statement we have just quoted is in many ways analogous to the right wing political slogan of the cold war era

'Better dead than red'. Also if one either does not believe in the holy or the sacred or does believe in that category of value but does not believe that it can apply to animals then the idea that any animal is of higher value than any human being is highly immoral. Anyone who wishes to justify regarding animals or more commonly only certain species of animals as sacred has first of all got to justify the idea of concept of the holy or the sacred and then to justify its application to animals in general and to certain species of animals in particular. Both of these tasks are immensely difficult. In theory one could hold the view that all animals are sacred or that certain large categories of animals such as mammals are sacred but in fact people who regard animals as sacred are very specific or strictly speaking generic about the matter. It might be argued that this limitation of the application of the category follows from its very nature. Monotheism is sometimes claimed to be superior to polytheism on the grounds that the sheer rarity value of one god makes that god more sacred or more holy than any one of a multitude of gods. Similarly one might argue that a belief in the holiness of one species of animal is superior to a belief in the holiness of all animals or of a large category of animals such as mammals. The potentially infinite number of individuals in a biological species which is an open class creates difficulties here. The Israelites who worshipped a golden calf had the good sense to make only one of the beasts. The trouble with sacred cows is that there are too many of them. One is expected to regard any old cow in India as sacred. This point draws our attention to a striking difference between moral value and other forms of value. Rarity and scarcity are prized both in the market place and in the realm of the holy. But we do not in moral theory regard the potentially infinite number of individuals in the species *Homo sapiens* as a reason for lowering the moral status of people. It should be noted that social status operates

to a certain extent on the principles of the market place and of holiness rather than of morality. There may be many princes but by definition there is only one monarch in a kingdom and so the monarch's superiority over princes is enhanced. The same is true of a vice chancellor and the members of the professoriate in a university. Just as there are however rare objects which are too hideous or repulsive or dangerous to be regarded as valuable so there are rare social roles such as that of executioner which are too repulsive to acquire high social status. Possibly the clearest examples of the preservation of rarity for its own sake is to be found in the attempt to prevent the extinction of rare and dwindling species of plants and animals even although the species concerned may be neither beautiful nor useful. But even here things are not quite as they seem because people are unlikely to try to preserve species which are dangerous to man. Only harmless if ugly and useless species are likely to be preserved and harmless, beautiful and useless species stand a much better chance of qualifying for preservation.

In between pets and pests there are many species of animal which are useful to humans in a variety of ways. Machines have in general replaced animals as sources of power for travel and transport in technologically advanced societies but animals are still extensively used for these purposes in technologically primitive societies. Technological advance has also reduced the demand for animal products such as wool and leather but animals are still extensively used in all societies for food and for laboratory purposes. It seems likely that the advance of technology may one day provide alternatives if not replacements for animals as human food. As far as the production of human food is concerned animals are devices for turning plants into muscle which is consumed by humans. Plants could presumably be processed by non biological devices or alternatives to plants could be used



directly as food. Animals may not however be easily replaceable in biological, medical and psychological laboratories where they are used inter alia as simplified models of humans. What is found to be true of laboratory animals may be true of humans. And some of the non human qualities of animals such as the high fertility and short life span of *Drosophila*, to which the science of genetics owes so much, are often extremely useful to the biologist or similar scientist.

Pets are worth special consideration since they are from the social point of view the animals which are nearest to humans. Not all pets however are of equal social interest. Dogs are more important than goldfish, frogs or earthworms. It may be suggested that humans are more likely to develop stronger emotional attachments to dogs than to goldfish, frogs, earthworms or even peacocks though all these animals are entirely eligible for pethood. Perhaps those with a biological training are liable to make pets of such animals as *Amoeba*, *Hydra* or, most glorious of all, *Amphioxus*. But dogs are more important than any of these because of their greater biological and hence emotional resemblance to humans. One may regard emotional relationships with animals as very undesirable substitutes for emotional relationships with other humans but undesirable or not they are to be found and some people in some circumstances may not have any human alternatives to pets available. Pets enjoy their social position because of their resemblance to humans. That resemblance may not seem very great and in those cases where it is especially marked humorists have often suggested that it is the human who resembles the pet rather than the reverse. Those people who indulge in physical contact with their pets are unlikely to regard any non biological entities as suitable substitutes. One may hope that they would prefer physical contact with humans to physical contact with pets but physical contact with some type of mammal is generally the only

type of physical contact indulged in for its own sake by all except the fetishist. There are of course those who indulge in various types of sexual contact with animals either with or without orgasm either human or animal. Newspaper reports of court hearings resulting from such incidents seem to suggest that pets are rarely used and that farmyard animals are frequently employed in these affairs. If such behaviour is regarded as intentional cruelty to animals by those who indulge in it then logical reasons pets are unlikely to be used because by definition a pet is an animal which one cherishes rather than tortures. But although those who do not indulge in such practices are likely to see them as a form of cruelty to animals it is probable that those who do indulge in them see them in a different light. It is just possible that these people regard their activities as a logical extension of physical contact with pets and either do or would use pets if they are or were anatomically suitable. It is outwith the scope of the work to comment on the view that such practices should be condemned as unnatural because it is not clear what the view means and also because the view may involve natural law which is an obscure and difficult concept. It is also outwith the scope of this work to comment on the alleged activities of certain powers in providing herds of such animals as yaks for the sexual indulgence of their armies. At the same time however we should note that the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' are highly evaluative although they may appear to be totally descriptive. To a certain extent they are similar in that respect to the terms 'animal' and 'machine' which we have already examined and which also appear to be totally descriptive. A closer analogy can however be drawn between the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' and the terms 'mature' and 'immature' as applied to human beings. In the next chapter we look fairly closely at the concept of maturity and much of what we say in our discussion of 'mature' and 'immature' applies

to the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural'.

It is often claimed that animals have a moral as well as a social status. The basis of this claim generally seems to be the belief that animals experience pain. Certain animals do display pain behaviour. Some philosophers take the view that pain is nothing more than pain behaviour and that the sentences 'I am in pain' and 'I have a pain in my right eyelid' are not statements but are simply sophisticated versions of yelps and screams. I have tried to give my reasons for disagreeing with this view in my unpublished Oxford BLitt thesis "Private Experiences".

It would not be appropriate to quote the whole of the brief chapter on pain in that work here but two passages may perhaps be selected in order to try to indicate the main points of the argument. After talking about the traditional distinction between pain and pain behaviour I claimed that 'the traditionalists say that each person argues inductively from the normal concurrence of pain and pain behaviour in his case to a similar concurrence in the case of others whose pain behaviour he observes'. Then I went on to say (op cit p6)

Every first year student of philosophy knows that the inductive argument is very weak and that its principal result is scepticism. But it is an argument which should rightly be applied principally to infants, apes and other animals. If a doctor wants to know about his patient's pain he does not normally centre his attention on the patient's grimaces and twitches and then start to reason inductively, rather he questions the patient closely about his pain. And I would claim that the most subtle and sophisticated pain language games are played in doctors' consulting rooms. But they seem to have been ignored by philosophers with, as will be apparent later, serious philosophical results. Philosophers have talked about pain language games but the usual example which is quoted concerns someone who limps around clutching his leg and saying, 'I have hurt my leg' or 'I have a pain in my leg' or something of the sort. Now that particular language game, if it can be reasonably called a language game, lends itself to interpretation along the lines of the avowal theory which will be considered in due course but perhaps we ought to consider the kind of things that are said in consulting rooms before we rush to embrace that theory. The co-operation of the medical profession might well be required before one could get a genuine example so the following is inevitably very crude but it may serve as a rather



poor substitute for the real thing.

- Doctor: 'When did your pain start?'
- Patient: 'It started a week ago'.
- D. 'Has it been present all the time?'
- P. 'No it usually comes on when I wake up, but gradually becomes less severe during the morning and disappears after lunch'.
- D. 'Where exactly is this pain?'
- P. 'It is centred round my nose but when it is at its very worst, when I wake up, it is all over the face; but by lunch time I can't feel it much beyond my nose.'
- D. 'What kind of pain would you say it is?'
- P. 'It is a burning and throbbing kind of pain.'

Now I would claim that such a language game can be understood only on the assumption that the doctor is asking about and the patient is talking about something to which the patient has private access. The doctor is seeking and the patient is supplying information about something, or in other words the patient is describing something to the doctor.

Two objections can immediately be raised against the last paragraph. The first of these is the general scepticism about other minds which would rule out any attention being paid to language noises emanating from anthropoid objects on the grounds that it is highly doubtful if any thoughts lie behind or accompany such noises. I would claim that such a view rests on serious mistakes about the relationships between thinking and saying but as I deal with that topic to a certain extent at any rate in the chapter on thought and volition I shall not attempt to answer that objection at this stage. The other objection, which should be dealt with at this stage, concerns the alleged impossibility of pain language ever being learned by anyone, if the traditional view of pain is correct. According to a very familiar story we have criteria for the use of the sentence 'he is in pain' and these criteria are behavioural. So there is no problem about the consistent and correct usage of such a sentence. But, so the story goes on, there is an insoluble problem about the consistent and correct use of first person pain sentence such as 'I am in pain' if these are regarded as statements and not avowals. The whole private language problem is brought in at this stage to confound the traditionalists. But perhaps the traditionalists' plight is not as desperate as some would have us believe. When a child is hurt it is aware primarily of the injured part of its body and only to a limited extent if at all is it aware of its pain behaviour. Only when the pain is gone will it dab its eyes and blow its nose and perhaps feel a little ashamed of the amount of noise people

say it has been making and be concerned at the fact that the cat was frightened out of its wits by the general commotion. So if one talks to a child in pain about pain the child will undoubtedly associate the word 'pain' with a sensation. And children who have themselves been in pain very often laugh when they first observe the pain behaviour of others. They have to be taught that the movements and grimaces of an injured person are not in fact the clowning that they appear to be but are a sign that the person is in pain. The lesson is certainly learned at an early age for there are few things that embarrass a mother more than the laughter of her child at someone else's injury. But it is as well to remember that without teaching it does not occur to us that the wincing and grimacing man is to be consoled and comforted rather than laughed at.

When questioning reveals that people who are exhibiting or who have exhibited pain behaviour are or have been at the same time aware of an unpleasant sensation we have good reason as distinct from maternal authority for taking pain behaviour as a sign of pain. Someone who exhibited pain behaviour but never experienced pain could not fully understand or take part in the kind of pain language game mentioned above. Still the private language problem remains though perhaps if we look at wounds and injuries we can begin to see how to escape from its clutches. As a matter of fact though not of logic pains usually accompany wounds and injuries. And it is by means of wounds and injuries which are in the public world that we can as far as possible ensure that pain language is associated with public objects and events. We can refer to our pains by means of the accompanying injuries, e.g. 'the pain I felt when I broke my leg'. Also we find that similar sorts of pains accompany similar sorts of injuries e.g. if I break my leg in January and then break it again in September of the same year I am liable to find that both the September injury and pain resemble and revive memories of the January injury and pain.

Later on in the chapter I tackled the avowal theory and in particular I objected to the exposition of that theory by Mr M E Lean and so I said that (op cit p 21)

One of the clearest and most extreme expressions of the avowal theory can be found in Lean's article entitled 'Mr Gasking on Avowals' where we read (Butler pp. 183 - 4)

Avowals are not ungrounded merely in the respect that the speaker is unaware of, or unable to specify what the basis of his statement might be. They require no ground because they make no claim whatsoever. And there couldn't ever such thing as a ground for them, because a 'ground' is something in the speaker's awareness, consciousness, or mind', which leads him to make a claim about something else, whereas an avowal

refers or pertains only to what is in the speaker's mind' itself. Avowals are merely verbalizations, so to speak, of the describable content of the speaker's imagery, sensations, feelings, attitudes, inclinations, and the like - in the sense in which, say, the particular after-image that one person may be 'seeing', e.g. 'a solid white patch on a black background', may be said to differ in content' from that which another person is experiencing, e.g. 'a broken red patch on a grey background' (even though in either case the reference, of course, is to nothing that exists independently of their respective visual awarenesses).

The sentence beginning 'And there could'nt ever be such a thing as a ground for them....' is an arbitrary attempt to rule out the possibility of statements about private experiences. As there is no ground reason for accepting it or for using the term 'ground' in the way suggested it is perhaps best to reject it outright though we may note in passing that the ground of a or my statement about e.g. my car is my car and not anything in my or anyone else's awareness, 'consciousness' or 'mind'. The following sentence which begins 'Avowals are merely verbalizations - 'is at best confused and at worst incomprehensible. It is a good thing that the word 'verbalizations' is printed in italics because it is a word which requires some attention. Presumably Lean means by 'verbalization' a turning or a changing into words though it is interesting to note that the Concise O.D. says that the verb 'to verbalize' means to 'Make (noun etc.) into a verb'. But if we accept the presumed meaning then we must try to decide precisely what kind of things can be turned or changed into words. One can turn the statement ' $7 + 5 = 12$ ' into words by writing 'seven plus five equals twelve', and speaking generally one can say that pieces of various types of symbolism e.g. chemical symbolism can be turned into words. Now anything else can be turned or changed into words is not at all clear. It should be noticed that a verbal reaction to something is very different from a verbalization (in Lean's sense of the term) of it. A verbal reaction to pain for instance may be a four letter word or a statement or a poem or just simply verse e.g. Robert Burns' 'Address to the Toothache' ('My curse upon your venom'd stang' etc.) But not content with talking about 'verbalizations' Lean makes confusion worse confounded by talking of the verbalization of the describable content of something. Although one would hesitate to call a description of something a verbalization of the describable content of that thing yet if one is faced with the odd phrase 'the verbalization of the describable content of x' one has either to say, with I think considerable justification, that it is a meaningless phrase or one has to use one's imagination and say that it is a strange circumlocution from the simple word 'description'. It does not much matter which of these alternatives we adopt for neither of them can make much sense of the sentence. It is as well to note that if by any chance the sentence is intended to mean that avowals are 'verbalizations' of e.g. after images then it is very serious nonsense indeed for however hard one tries one cannot turn an after image into words or e.g. pains into words or indeed into anything else for that matter.

Now we can return to our main argument and say that it is possible



that animals experience pain but it is not by any means certain. Perhaps it might be best to say that animals have a *prima facie* moral status and that relieving and not causing possible animal pain are *prima facie* duties. In general we can say that animals are of *prima facie* moral concern to moral agents because of the possibility that they may experience pain but they are not themselves moral agents, they are not capable of action but only of behaviour. The concepts of responsibility and intention cannot be clearly and satisfactorily applied to animals. We can clarify matters further by looking at what might at first sight appear to be role playing by animals. A prison guard dog may be taken home by the guard and in the guard's house it may be the family pet. Inside the prison one may meet the guard and the dog at work together as guard and guard dog and outside the gate one may see them as a man going home from work with his pet dog. The change from prison officer's uniform to boutique unisex leisure wear makes the man's role change vivid and dramatic and the removal of the guard dog lead helps the dog. Both man and dog behave differently in the work situation and the home situation. The essential difference between the man and the dog is that the man either knows he is filling a role or can at least in theory be made aware of the fact that he is filling a role while the dog does not know any such thing. We can talk about the man's interpretation of the role but in the case of the dog we have to talk about its quasi role filling behaviour which can be explained as a series of responses to a series of stimuli. The man's role interpretation cannot be satisfactorily explained without reference to his understanding of the role and his intentions in relation to it. Sometimes we may wish to suggest that people fill roles of which they are not aware and we may wish to call these latent roles. If we think that religion has a secular function in society we may think that the role of clergyman can be seen, to a

large extent at any rate, from a secular point of view. In a simpler case we may see that a trade instructor at a borstal is filling the role of father substitute in relation to a certain borstal boy although the man himself sees his actions purely in terms of teaching the boy bricklaying. Both the clergyman and the bricklaying instructor in the borstal can in theory at any rate become aware of their latent roles. Dogs are never aware of their quasi roles and cannot become aware of them unless they can first master a language. A dog which had mastered a language would not be an animal. Precisely what it or he would be is difficult to say. A language using dog might stand in relation to a non language using and hence animal dog as an angel is supposed to stand in relation to a man.

Social anthropologists have sometimes said vaguely interesting things about the social status of animals. And so we find the following passage in Dr Edward Leach's book Levi - Strauss (p 40)

'It is a fact of empirical observation that human beings everywhere adopt ritual attitudes towards the animals and plants in their vicinity. Consider, for example, the separate, and often bizzare rules which govern the behaviour of Englishmen towards the creatures which they classify as (i) wild animals (ii) foxes (iii) game (iv) farm animals (v) pets (vi) vermin. Notice further that if we take the sequence of words (ia) strangers (iia) enemies (iiia) friends (iva) neighbours (va) companions (via) criminals, the two sets of terms are in some degree homologous. By a metaphorical usage the categories of animals could be (and sometimes are) used as equivalents for the categories of human beings'.

We may be somewhat surprised to see game regarded as the equivalent of friends or vice versa but we can perhaps let that pass. A very important point is the different attitudes we adopt to the suffering or the production of the suffering of members of the various equivalent categories of animals and people. From the point of view of moral theory it is wrong to cause unnecessary suffering to any human or to any animal. In actual fact however the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

Animals is unlikely to be interested if one phones to say that one is distressed because the rat poison one is using appears to be causing acute ante mortem agony to the many rats which have eaten it. If however one's pet skunk has a meal of rat poison and then endures ante mortem agony many people are likely to sympathise with one's distress. Campaigns against pain causing traps for foxes might appear to contradict the point we have just made but they are at best ambiguous as far as this matter is concerned. Pets may be caught in them and the English tend to believe that foxes should be hunted to death rather than caught in traps. Most people are probably in favour of the use of humane killers in slaughter houses but possibly simply because of the type of animals that are normally killed in such places. If rat skins were greatly prized and had to be removed from rats before rigor mortis set in rats might be sent to slaughter houses. In such circumstances people might not object to the use of inhumane killers. On the human side of the fence criminals are sometimes regarded as being less than human and are therefore treated in a sub human fashion by being placed in sub human institutions such as prisons. Prisoners have been known to assert that they are not animals. Presumably they make this assertion either because other people assert that they are animals or because the way they are treated suggests to them that those who run prisons sometimes think that they are animals. It is not surprising that Hitler declared that the Jews were vermin before he sent them to concentration camps. Indeed declaring that Jews were vermin provided the immoral justification of such camps. If one thinks that all vermin should be destroyed and that all Jews are vermin it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that all Jews should be destroyed.

Finally it should be noted that the type of relationship between human and animal categories we have been discussing can also be found between human and plant categories. An interesting if unpleasant example



of this relationship was given in The Guardian on 30/12/71 where the chairman of the Essex branch of the fascist organisation called the Monday Club was quoted as saying that Essex University students were regarded 'by many Essex ratepayers as an insidious and subversive weed for which we have yet to find a suitable herbicide'. At the other extreme we find poets and poetasters comparing their loves to roses.

Now it is time to consider the social status of machines and to compare it with that of animals. Like certain animals certain machines may be given proper names. And individuals, human or otherwise, which are given proper names have a higher social status than those which are not given proper names. Pets are given proper names and so are many transport machines such as ships and aircraft. It might be objected that ships are rarely given true proper names such as 'John' but rather are referred to by the use of such expressions as 'HMS Orgy' which contains a clearly descriptive and class membership element viz 'Her Majesty's Ship'. Perhaps one should talk about individualising expressions or phrases which are analogous in certain respects to proper names. The important point as far as we are concerned is that the use of proper names and analogous expressions confers and marks high social status. The use of identifying numbers as in the army, prisons and motor registration offices signifies a lower social status than that signified by the use of proper names and analogous expressions. Lower social status still is denoted by the use of ostensive descriptive phrases such as 'the Jersey cow beside the tree on the horizon' and 'the exploding art object above the latrine behind the vice chancellor'.

But despite the use of proper names and analogous expressions machines have a lower social status than animals. This is partly because animals have a moral status as we noted above and machines do not. Also however it is a matter of the possibility of emotional

relationships between animals and humans. The kind of emotional relationships mentioned above do not exist between humans and machines. Humans do not embrace machines because they are not made of substances which it is pleasant to embrace and they do not respond to embraces. In addition they do not respond to emotional communication of a non tactual nature at a distance. There is no reason in principle however why machines should not be devised which could respond to emotional communications. The idea of machines responding to humans has already been put into practice not only in chess playing machines but more importantly in teaching machines which respond to their pupils' mistakes and rate of progress if any. Before emotional relationships could develop between machines and humans machines would have to acquire quasi biological features. A type of incarnation is required with the use of synthetic flesh. Behind the synthetic flesh there would have to be a mechanism for producing human like responses or at least pet like responses to emotional communications from humans. If in addition these machines incorporated, in an almost literal sense, computers or computer like devices which gave them advanced intellectual capacities we would have machines of very high social status. Indeed it is very possible that we would not be entirely sure whether they should be called machines or people. In private conversation a philosopher suggested that the kind of entity I have been describing could not possibly be a human being but would be simply a 'machine made of meat'. Now if one tries to argue that a machine made of meat is a human being one is in the same position as someone who tries to argue that murder is not wrong or is not always wrong. By definition murder is always wrong and by definition a machine made of meat cannot be a human being. Meat comes from animals and so a machine made of meat is as it were a machine animal or an animal machine. At the beginning of this chapter

we noted that animals and machines both have sub human status. And an entity which is given the status of both an animal and a machine is doubly damned as far as its chances of being recognised as human are concerned. There is however no need to indulge in this exercise in damnation which is pretending to be an exercise in description. Calling the entity we are talking about a machine made of meat is like calling criminals vermin. The entity we have envisaged would be able to do certain important things which at present only human beings can do. It would therefore have a reasonable claim to human status. The fact that it would also have a certain characteristics in common with both machines and animals cannot be decisive because human beings also have a lot in common with both machines and animals, particularly animals.

#### Section 4 - Market place evaluation of animals and machines in relation to people

In the quadrangle one is unlikely to meet anyone who values animals or machines as highly or more highly than people. When one leaves the quadrangle and goes into the market place however the situation is very different. A pleasant murderer I know told me that he would rather trust an animal such as a bull than a person. That young man has a rich tapestry of belief that includes satanism, black magic and reincarnation. The idea of human sacrifice seems acceptable to him provided there is in his words 'some good reason for it' although he did not say what he would regard as a good reason for such an activity. Except for the sexual aspects of their relationship he said that he would value an animal such as a bull as highly as his girl friend. When he told me these things he appeared to be totally sincere and he did not appear to be playing the well known prison game of telling bizarre tales to the assistant governor.



Certainly there are various ways of interpreting that young man's remarks and one is almost bound to say that his emotional development has been seriously disturbed. Ill informed people might wish to display their ignorance by saying that it is not surprising to find a murderer holding such views. In actual fact many murderers, especially domestic murderers, are civilised people who would totally disapprove of the young man's views. And the murder in question did not seem to be produced by his beliefs but appeared to be a simple case of panic caused by being discovered while carrying out a burglary leading as it so often does to murder. This case of a twenty year old murderer serves merely to point out the difference in belief about the evaluation of animals, people and in some cases machines that exist between the quadrangle and the market place. At least when I interviewed him the murderer did not attempt to justify his views or to advance any arguments in favour of them and it is very doubtful if in fact he would be able to indulge in such intellectual activities. But we must now turn to cases where at least some sort of arguments are advanced in favour of views which are just as strange as those of the murderer.

An argument that a whole animal species is of greater value than a single human being has been put forward by Mr John Aspinall who is not a moral philosopher or indeed any sort of pundit but is actually a gambling club owner. The details of his views and the circumstances in which they arose were given in The Times for 8th December 1972 as follows :-

Mr John Aspinall told Mr Justice Cantley in the High Court yesterday that he would sacrifice the life of his own daughter if it meant saving an animal species from extinction.

Mr Aspinall, a Mayfair gambling club owner, said naturally he loved his daughter very dearly, and the situation was hypothetical.

He continued: "I think everyone would accept that no one

human life is worth a whole animal species which has survived 200 million years of evolution.

Mr Aspinall, who says more than half his 20 best friends are gorillas and other wild animals was giving evidence in the action in which he is being sued for damages by Miss Marilyn Lamb, aged 22, a model. Miss Lamb of Manor Farm, Rodmarton, Gloucestershire, who recently married, was mauled when she put her hand into a tiger's cage while she was a guest at Mr Aspinall's private zoo in Kent.

From the moral point of view an animal species has no particular value unless it makes some kind of contribution to human welfare either directly or indirectly. At one time the sudden death of all horses would have caused considerable problems for human society. And one would perhaps imagine circumstances in which the sudden removal of a particular species from the earth might possibly cause a type of biological disaster which could threaten human life. Only if the removal of an animal species was certain to threaten human life either directly or indirectly would it be moral for a person to consider sacrificing his life for the sake of that species in some unlikely set of circumstances in which a person's death could save a species from extinction. A person who did decide to die in these circumstances would of course be dying for other people and not for an animal species. Requiring a person to die in these circumstances would be a quite different matter and would be immoral. In actual fact not only is it difficult to think of circumstances in which a person's death could save an animal species from extinction, but it is also very difficult to think of a species whose removal would be a total disaster for humanity. At the time horses were much used for transport they were also much used for warfare and so their total removal at that time would have produced certain advantages for the human race. There are certain strict vegetarians who would seem to want a world without cows or hens or at least without the consumption by human beings of cows milk and hens eggs. The prevalence of obesity in the over

developed world may very well support their point of view.

Although Aspinall's point of view cannot be supported it does have some perhaps not every great value from the academic point of view. Prima facie at any rate it is more reasonable to claim that an animal species is more valuable than a human being than it is to claim that a single animal, even a sacred one, is more valuable than a human being. Secunda facie however as we have seen it is not. Aspinall also uses the argument which is quite often heard in the market place that because something is very old it is either true or valuable. And so some preachers sometimes try to argue that there must be some truth in Christianity because it has lasted for a long time. The argument is unsound because there is no reason why what is false and worthless should not last indefinitely. Astrology for example is older than either Judaism or Christianity and may very well continue for an indefinite time.

A less sophisticated version of the view that in certain circumstances human beings should be sacrificed for animals was given in the New Statesman for 3rd August 1973 where in the delightful and important 'This England' column it was reported from not very surprisingly the Daily Telegraph that a Birmingham housewife had offered herself as a poison gas guinea pig instead of two hundred beagle puppies the American Air Force planned to use in noxious fumes tests. Doubtless the offer was made in the certain knowledge that it would be refused but if the housewife had been serious about the matter and had been able to substitute herself for the puppies without anyone's knowledge she would have been acting quite immorally. In many circumstances there is absolutely nothing immoral about suicide but even running the risk of suicide or serious injury for the sake of animals is quite immoral unless the survival of the animals in question contributes directly and vitally to human survival. The doctrine of respect for persons involves respect for oneself as a



person.

The English tend to be quite idiotic about animals but one might fondly imagine that they could not possibly be as idiotic about machines and things. Unfortunately there is no sound foundation for that belief. In The Times for 18th May 1973 it was reported that

Squadron Leader Malcom Pugh has been awarded the Air Force Cross for saving his £1.5m Harrier jump jet aircraft, which was disabled over the Cairngorms by birds being sucked into the engine.

Squadron Leader Pugh, aged 40, of RAF Wittering, was about to eject when his engine re-started and he made a safe landing. The citation read: Despite the risk to his life he undoubtedly saved a valuable aircraft.

From the moral point of view Squadron Leader Pugh should have been reprimanded rather than decorated and those who encouraged immorality by recommending him for an award should have been dealt with very severely indeed. It is immoral to risk one's life for a machine however valuable in economic terms unless that machine contributes directly and vitally to human survival. One could imagine circumstances in which for example saving a prototype aircraft could prevent one's country from being defeated in war and one could at any rate argue that in such circumstances an action such as Pugh's would be heroic and deserving of praise. But the circumstances in Britain in May 1973 were not these we have imagined and were indeed such that Pugh acted immorally in risking his life for the sake of a machine. Naturally the speed with which he had to take the decision was a strong mitigating factor and might make one want to say that because of it a reprimand would be unjustified although against that point of view it could be argued that a reprimand would be justified pour encourager les autres and to preserve moral standards. There are however no known mitigating factors in favour

of those who decided that Pugh should be recommended for an award.

Immoral commendations are very dangerous indeed. Perhaps we can digress for a moment and consider the case of the policeman who shot and killed two youths who carried toy pistols into the Indian High Commission building in London in 1973. Some people actually commended these policemen for their bravery although there is nothing remotely brave about shooting unarmed people even if one imagines they are armed. The youths posed at most only a psychological threat to the armed policemen. One might want to say that no blame should be attached to the policemen because the youths appeared to be armed although in fact they were not. But it could be argued quite strongly that even if the youths had actually been armed the police action would still have been cowardly rather than heroic because they fired first. In any event the choice lies between condemning or not condemning the policemen. The question of praising them simply does not arise and is totally immoral.

Now we must return to our subject and content ourselves with two more examples of market place evaluations in favour of things as opposed to people. Sometimes it is suggested that in the engineering construction industry the loss of human life is considered acceptable provided it does not go beyond the limit of one death for every million pounds worth of work completed. Since apart from some suicides no avoidable premature human deaths are morally acceptable they cannot be made acceptable by relating them to measures of production in any industry.

In the field of sentencing unfairness and injustice abound but even by the standards or rather lack of standards of that grim and often pointless activity I find it difficult to forget the cases of two men I once interviewed. One of them received a four year sentence for manslaughter and the other received a twelve year sentence for aggravated burglary. It would perhaps be hard to find a clearer example of placing

a higher value of things than on people. Considering the details of the cases only makes matters worse. One weekend the burglar had with others broken into and stolen money from a bank in which he was employed when the bank was closed for business and contained no members of staff. The manslayer was a male homosexual prostitute who had a considerable fear of choking. Oral sex with his customers was in no way repugnant to him but his victim introduced his penis into the prostitute's mouth with such a force that his fear of choking was aroused and caused him to stab his customer to death with a fruit knife that unfortunately was lying at the time beside the bed which was the manslayer's place of work. One may perhaps hazard a guess that certain judges may perhaps have extreme ideas about the value of banks and their contents and may perhaps be nauseated by or even may be simply ignorant of some of the facts of life as led by inter alios male homosexual prostitutes but no explanations of these sentences can justify them from the comparative point of view. To his great credit the manslayer said that he had expected a much longer sentence and considered his sentence to be undeservedly short.

There may at first sight appear to be something of a contradiction between this section and the other sections of this chapter. In this section we have drawn a very firm moral dividing line between people on the one hand and animals and machines on the other. Yet in the other sections we have talked about language using animals and possible electronic people. There is however no contradiction between these two areas of discussion. If electronic people ever arrive on the scene only the insulting and the confused will want to call them machines. They will be most unlike jet fighters and if they start flying around in such machines they will be well advised to remember the case of Squadron Leader Pugh. As long as machines remain machines and animals remain animals a strong moral line divides them from people. But we



argued in the earlier sections of this chapter that it is within the limits of possibility that in due course some machines may not remain machines as it were but may cross the dividing line.

Our discussion of animals and machines has inevitably involved a certain amount of discussion of people. Now however we must in the next chapter look at people directly.

## Chapter V

### HUMAN INDIVIDUALS

#### Section 1 - Individuals and roles

We notice sometimes that the man who delivers our mail and wins the prize for tossing the caber at the Aboyne Highland Games and breaks into our house is one and the same. In other words we recognise one individual in several different roles. What we cannot easily do is find a roleless individual. A naked man in a totally empty room is unlikely to be roleless, he is very probably taking part in an experiment on sensory deprivation. And a solitary woman on a blasted heath is probably a hermit member of the Womens Liberation Movement. The problem was noted in Chapter 1 where we were just able to regard sleeping people as being as roleless as anyone ever can be. Roles and individuals are like colour and shape, we cannot find one without the other. But just as we can appreciate the difference between colour and shape by seeing the same colour in different shapes and the same shape in different colours so we can appreciate the difference between individuals and roles by seeing the same individual in different roles and the same role held by different individuals. It is not only when we observe others that we see the very close link between roles and individuals. Although we can stand back from our roles and think about them we can never escape from them except in sleep. Each individual forms his own sense of personal identity by being aware that in certain respects he remains the same whichever role he is holding although it is also true that he alters and changes with each change in role.

Bodies do not change with a change in role although physical appearance and movements may change. What does not change from role to role is primarily biological. Both medical science and psychology try to study something that does not change from role to role. Even these sciences however must take account of roles. The type of physical existence required by a man's role is likely to influence the types of diseases he is most likely to suffer from. At one extreme we have occupational diseases and at the other diseases which are not in any way related to roles. Both clinical and psychological investigations involve roles at least as long as the subject remains conscious and even to a certain extent if he does not. The roles of clinician, patient, psychologist, psychological tester and subject of either psychological experiment or testing both explain the behaviour of people in clinical and psychological situations and may influence what can be discovered in these situations. And personality which may be regarded as the sum or total of those aspects of an individual's behaviour which do not change from role to role or which remain constant from one role to another, is a product of an individual's biological constitution and the roles he has held in the past. That definition is not as contradictory as it may seem because some roles leave their mark on the individual and influence his behaviour in virtually all subsequent roles. The discussion of attitudes in chapter 1 attempted to throw some light on the matter. In general we may say that although people are not animals human individuals are. Human individuals are members of the species *Homo sapiens*. As soon as these individuals occupy roles they become people. And language and personality are the effect of roles on individuals. In order to understand language and personality therefore we must take account of both biological and social factors or in other words both individual and role factors. Language and personality are biosocial



phenomena. People however are not simply biosocial phenomena because a complete account of a person must include consciousness, decision, intention and morality although we have already seen in chapter II that the role of moral agent lies at the heart of morality.

## Section 2 - The Life History of Individuals

A human individual normally starts his life in the Homo sapiens uterus. Embryology might seem to be the science which can shed most light on an individual's origins but there is a sense in which embryology cannot tell us what is in a pregnant woman's uterus. Possibly the three most important answers to that question are a foetus, the products of conception and an unborn child. The conflict amongst these terms comes out most clearly over the question of surgical abortion. Those who are in favour of it often wish to avoid the suggestion that any kind of killing is involved and so one finds that some books give instruction in the technique of removing the products of conception. And that sounds an extremely innocent operation rather like removing waste products or possibly an inflamed appendix. Those who are opposed to abortion say it is the murder of an unborn children. The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child sounds an admirable organisation and indeed it may remind us of the Society for the Protection of the Crippled Child but it is in fact on the same level as the Society for the Protection of the Dead Child. Both unborn children and dead children are simply not children at all. They cannot do any of the things that children can do. If one asks where someone's child is and is told that either he is in his grave or in his mother's uterus one understands that the assumption on which one's question was based was mistaken. Eton complicates matters by accepting bookings from the husbands of pregnant women as well as from

the husbands of mothers. But that is simply a matter of saying that if Blogge's pregnant wife produces a male child who is reasonably normal and who survives until the appropriate age then he will be given a place in the college. Nothing is gained by calling a foetus either the products of conception or an unborn child. Surgical abortion is not homicide or even infanticide, it is foeticide. And foeticide can be moral or amoral or immoral depending on the relevant circumstances. Normally it is amoral but in special circumstances it can be either moral or immoral. If it saves a woman's life it is moral but if it deprives a woman of her only chance of having a child of her own it may be immoral.

A foetus is a potential person and some people argue that if it is wrong to kill a person it must be wrong to kill a potential person. That is a non sequitur. The death of a person is very different from the death of a potential person. Perhaps medical students can help us here because a medical student is like a foetus in the sense that just as a foetus can be called a potential person so a medical student can be called a potential doctor. And the wastage of medical students is different from the wastage of doctors. One must not of course get carried away by this analogy. People who leave medicine do not necessarily die, they usually go and do something non-medical such as stockbroking. But the analogy remains useful. A medical student becomes more and more like a doctor in every possible way the longer he spends in a medical college and a foetus becomes more and more like an individual the longer it spends in the uterus provided that both the medical student and the foetus progress in the relevant and appropriate normal fashion. A late departure from either a medical college or a uterus is undesirable and ill advised. Most people want to see a reasonable supply of both people and doctors provided for the future. One can easily imagine a

situation in which it might seem essential to try to ensure that every foetus survived to birth and became an individual and a person and also that every medical student survived to medical graduation and became a doctor. Equally it is possible to imagine a situation in which it might be desirable to kill a high percentage of foetuses and prevent a high percentage of medical students from becoming doctors. In such a situation however it would clearly be more sensible to limit both conception and entry to medical schools. It is interesting to note that the medical student analogy can illustrate the problem of saying what is in the uterus of a pregnant woman. A proud mother might prefer to say that her medical student son was training to be a doctor instead of saying that he was a medical student. In his final year at medical school her enthusiasm might get the better of her and she might say slightly prematurely that he was a doctor. At the same time a contemporary of the student who had taken a non medical degree and had therefore completed his studies earlier than the medical student might say sneeringly of him 'he is still just an overgrown schoolboy'. But just as in medical schools we find that those who are receiving instruction are normally medical students and not either doctors or overgrown schoolboys so we find that what is in the uterus of a pregnant woman is normally a foetus and not either an unborn child or the products of conception. There is one important point about the foetus with which the medical student analogy cannot help us. If a foetus is in the uterus of a woman or possibly has at any stage been in such a place then it cannot be considered in isolation from the relevant woman. And allowing a foetus to mature until at birth it becomes a child means that there is a moral obligation on someone to make the best possible arrangements for the child's upbringing. In many societies that means that a woman who gives birth to a child is under a prima facie obligation to become its mother. If



the woman is in either her own opinion or the opinion of appropriate others unable or unwilling to become the child's mother and if satisfactory alternative arrangements for the child's upbringing cannot be made then there is a strong prima facie case for killing the foetus. In any case in which either the foetus or the woman in whose uterus it is situated must be killed or allowed to die in order that the other may survive then the choice lies between killing a foetus and killing a person and foeticide is a lesser evil than homicide.

A court of law has evidently decided that, according to the account of the matter given in The Guardian, "an unborn baby is a separate being with full rights". In December 1971 the Victorian State Court in Australia decided, again according to The Guardian, that "Sylvia Watt, now aged 3, who was born with brain damage eight months after her mother had been paralysed in a car accident could sue for damages in the Supreme Court". It is not entirely clear from the report whether or not the court used the unsatisfactory talk about an 'unborn baby'. That confusion may have come from the journalist who wrote the paper's report in Melbourne on 9th December 1971. But in the light of the court's decision one would not be surprised if amidst the general confusion that particularly confused phrase was used in the formal decision. It would be more satisfactory to allow someone to sue for damages to the foetus from which he developed in a social as well as in a biological sense than to sue for damages to himself before he was born. And in addition it would be reasonable to allow the child's mother to sue for damages to the same foetus which was part of her. Any claim which ignores the mother's interest in the foetus or ignores the fact that it was a part, although a temporary part, of her is unsatisfactory. Indeed the mother's interest in the foetus might be held to be total and exclusive. It is possible for a foetus in her uterus to be a threat to a woman's life and in such

circumstances it is reasonable for her to take steps to ensure that it is killed and removed from her body.

Conception is the beginning of an individual but birth is the beginning of a person. Birth is a social as well as a biological event and it marks the transition from a pregnant woman to a mother and a child. In a sense Prof. G W Allport draws our attention to the main problem of birth in his book 'Pattern and Growth in Personality' where he says on page 75 'The infant is not greatly different from a fetus. Independent breathing is his principal achievement. Otherwise he is far more like a fetus than like the child he will become.' and on page 76 he writes 'Birth is a dramatic event for it marks the first step toward independence and individuation. If we consider how much a person's life is devoted to freeing himself from dependence on mother, home and cultural prescription, one can say birth starts the process of continually increasing autonomy and self-reliance.' Strangely enough Allport does not try to reconcile these two views of birth and he does not really give us any indication that he is aware of their opposition. Premature births highlight the problem. A premature baby is clearly more fetus like than a non-premature baby. (It is perhaps a matter of linguistic interest that a non-premature baby is not a baby child) And indeed someone might try to argue that if a premature child had not been premature he would have clearly been an unborn child because he would have been as he is but simply enclosed in the uterus. The biological differences between a premature child especially one which can survive outside an incubator and a fetus should not be ignored but they are not from the philosophical point of view at any rate vital. An intact umbilical cord connecting the fetus to the placenta means amongst other things that the fetus' lungs and pulmonary circulation are not in operation. But a premature child which does not require an incubator is at least in some degree a social unit and a person.

A sort of relationship can exist between it and others who are to a much greater extent persons. A premature child living outside an incubator can be said to hold the role of infant son of x. If the child had not been premature it would at that stage have been a highly developed foetus without any social status and no kind of relationship in any meaningful sense of the term could have existed between it and any person. The fact that it's biological state would not have been greatly changed is really irrelevant and the important fact is that it's social state would have been vastly different. A premature child which cannot exist outside an incubator is really an extra-uterine foetus rather than a child.

Childhood is both a biological and social matter. Biologically and socially children come between infants and adults. The biological position is indisputable but the social position may not be as inevitable as it is perhaps assumed to be. From the biological point of view there is simply no problem. A child is small, weak and sexually immature, or at least the paradigm case of a child is. Puberty may or may not bring adult status although it brings the end of biological childhood. The beginning of childhood is as imprecisely marked as its end. We might want to say that the acquisition of the ability to walk can be regarded as a possible end of infancy and the beginning of childhood. It is probably the most important step towards independence between birth and the acquisition of the ability to speak. In western society children hold a subordinate, protected and controlled position. They are subordinate in as much as they are from the legal point of view at any rate controlled by adults who ensure that children have both fewer rights and lesser responsibilities than adults. Even in America, the land where the child is king, the legal position is quite clear. It is interesting to ask if the social position of children is merely a matter of convention or is in any sense biologically or otherwise necessary. A child lacks the physical strength, the secondary sexual characteristics, the completely



developed primary sexual characteristics and the emotional states that arise from the adult psycho-sexual states that adults have. One can reasonably say therefore that children cannot be expected to understand or participate in the sexual and emotional aspects of adult life. But it is very difficult to advance an equally good case for excluding children from other aspects of adult life. Some children have vastly greater intellectual abilities than some adults and in the field of musical composition the great composers in some cases produced works in childhood which are far superior to the mature adult works of a great many second and third rate composers. It is very difficult to see why children should not be given the vote. Because of their intellectual ability some children are capable of a better understanding of political matters than many adults. Although it can be argued that the vote should be restricted to those who contribute to society by paying taxes it is not a very convincing argument. Old age pensioners who have no private income as well as students in the same position and of course paupers are all affected by political decisions and so should have the same political rights as surtax payers. Indeed all the arguments that can be advanced against the extension of the vote to children were probably at one time advanced against the extension of the vote to women. And in general the socially inferior position of children is analagous to the socially inferior position of women in the past and to a lesser extent at the present time.

Perhaps one can try to argue that children are dependent on adults but adults are not dependent on children. The whole question of a person's dependence on others is however extremely complex. There is a clear sense in which infants and the senile are totally dependent on others because they can do very little to procure their own food, or dispose of their own excreta, or keep themselves clean or avoid any type

of approaching danger. But apart from these extremes everyone exhibits a very complicated mixture of dependence and independence. One can be dependent on one's children, secretary, wife and friends as well as on sewage workers, prostitutes and chiropodists. And indeed one can be dependent on infants and the senile for a variety of things such as one's job or emotional satisfaction. If one says that A is dependent on B one is using an incomplete expression. One must make it clear that A is dependent on B for C. If A and B are people then the range of possibilities for C is very wide. Jobs, emotional satisfactions, money, lifts to work and instruction in the disembowling of cattle are just some of these possibilities. Despite the complications and complexities one might want to say that children are more dependent on adults than adults are on children. Even if this is true it is certainly not by itself a reason for giving children a social status inferior to that of adults. It may perhaps just possibly be true that women are more dependent on men than men are on women although it is clearly a hopelessly involved issue. But even if that is true it does not justify giving women a lower social status than men.

Senility highlights the problems of childhood. In many societies the senile enjoy all the rights that are denied to children despite the fact that they may be less capable of exercising these rights in a satisfactory manner than many children. Retirement could be given a much wider significance than it has at present. It could mean relinquishing full adult rights just as attaining the age of majority means receiving them. Such a procedure would produce many hard cases just as the present age of majority procedure does. A more rational system would be one in which permission to exercise rights would be related to a satisfactory performance in a test of the competence in the relevant area. Ideally all people of whatever age who can pass periodic driving tests of an appropriate

standard should be allowed to drive motor vehicles. And so ninety year old Aunt Augusta and her nine year old nephew might both be able to drive the car belonging to fifty year old Uncle Charles who is normally too alcoholic to pass any test of any type of competence. Driving motor vehicles is a skill or rather set of skills which lends itself very easily to comparatively objective testing. The ability to exercise political rights cannot be so easily tested but possibly one could devise a test of knowledge of actual information about any political system which would be acceptable to all sections of political opinion within the system and which could be used to govern the addition and deletion of names to and from the electoral roll. Clearly however there can be no test of voting competence analogous to a test of driving competence because it would be impossible to reach any sort of agreement about what should count as competent voting although it is comparatively easy to reach agreement about what constitutes competent driving. It would be wrong to suppose that there is any necessary connection between voting and literacy. In predominantly literate societies the needs and interest of illiterate adults tend to be largely ignored. Indeed in such societies 'illiterate' is normally a term of condemnation and often of abuse. Elections have however been held in predominantly illiterate societies. Political parties in such societies are identified by non verbal visual symbols. Thus in such societies voters may support the pig symbol party rather than the fascist party. If illiterate adults can take part in elections so can illiterate children and arrangements made for illiterate children would be of benefit to illiterate adults. The only absolute bar to political activity as well as to most other forms of social activity is a total lack of linguistic knowledge and ability. Tests about factual political matters can easily be administered in an oral rather than a written form. Certainly no civilised society should tolerate the disenfranchisement of adult illiterates.



Death is an important topic and much has been written about it. Possibly the biggest difficulty one encounters in this area is the fact that the language of death is often either extremely euphemistic or is based on highly questionable ideas of immortality or resurrection. Even if one leaves aside the more sentimental ideas of "falling asleep" and 'passing peacefully away' that may be very useful antidotes to the emotional shock and agony that can follow the death of someone one has known well, there is still the problem that everyday talk of death is active rather than passive. 'He died yesterday' sounds like 'he fell yesterday' when 'fell' is used in a non-euphemistic sense. One of the soundest things written about death is Wittgenstein's well known remark 'death is the end of life, and not an event in life'. Our everyday life language tends to give the impression that death is an event in life, not the end of life. 'He died suddenly' sounds like 'he arrived suddenly' and so on. Possibly in general talk about suicide tends to be less euphemistic than talk about other forms of death. In order to understand just how seriously misleading euphemisms about death can be it is necessary to consider actual examples. We shall see that both a society photographer and a philosopher are capable of saying quite peculiar things about death. The remarks by the society photographer appeared in the colour supplement of a Sunday newspaper and those by the philosopher in a philosophical journal. The Sunday newspaper article was entitled Mother and Son. The introductory paragraph explains the situation and runs as follows 'Vivienne, the society photographer, took her first professional picture at the age of 51. Her son, Antony Beauchamp, took his when he was 15. Both had simultaneous and successful careers until his suicide in 1957. Vivienne talks to Francis Wyndham. The following quotations from the article show the photographer's view of death. 'You know the story, don't you? It is really rather interesting. I married my art teacher, Ernest Entwistle.

He fell in love with me at first sight ..... Well he agreed of course so I gave in and we were married in 1913 and we had our Golden Wedding in 1963 and then he decided to go over the rainbow and that was that..... Then we had two sons. Tony was always very brilliant as a little boy..... He's always been brilliant at everything, isn't it terrible? That's why I wasn't at all unhappy when he went off for ever in 1957 because I know that wherever he is he'll always be at the very top of his profession."

The philosopher, Mr J D Mabbott, made a remark about death in his article 'Prof Flew on Punishment' which appeared in the journal Philosophy in 1955. In the course of the article Mr Mabbott said 'most punishments nowadays are not inflictions of suffering, either physical or mental. They are the deprivation of a good.... Imprisonment and fines are deprivations of liberty and property. The death sentence is deprivation of life; and in this extreme case every attempt is made to exclude suffering..... We have taken the ..... important step of substituting the removal of something desired for the infliction of positive suffering.'

Comment on the remarks of the society photographer is both slightly unnecessary and slightly unfair. But perhaps we should just notice when she says that her husband 'decided to go over the rainbow' she goes so far in using active rather than passive language in talking about death that one can be forgiven for thinking that her husband's death was a case of suicide. In the case of her son's suicide euphemism makes one almost imagine that he had gone off to Australia or some similarly outlandish place and had forgotten to send his mother his address. Mr Mabbot's remarks are both false and extremely confused. They also contain a certain amount of euphemism used by the society photographer. Imprisonment nearly always involves a greater or lesser degree of psychological suffering. Only if one regards house arrest as imprisonment can one find a form of imprisonment that may perhaps tend to cause comparatively little distress. Prisoners

are normally fairly depressed simply because they are in prison. Sometimes one meets prisoners who are in a state of acute distress simply because they are in prison. Such a state tends to pass fairly quickly but its existence refutes Mr Mabbot's idea. The two statements made by Mr Mabbot about death caused by capital punishment are both extremely unfortunate. If one says that someone has been deprived of something it is reasonable to expect to be able to see that person without the thing in question. And in such a case apart from the deprivation of the thing in question one would expect the person to be much as he always was. In dental surgery extractions are the deprivation of teeth but the death sentence is not the deprivation of life, it is killing or the ending of a person. If one sees a corpse one is not seeing a person deprived of his life because a corpse is not a person. In trying to talk about the deprivation of life one is trying to make death an event in life rather than the end of life. The remark about suffering need not detain us except to note that it is ambiguous. Suffering can be either physical pain or psychological distress. The passing of a death sentence inevitably causes the greatest possible amount of psychological distress. We must regard Mabbot's remark about death as seriously confused and misleading and slightly euphemistic.

The coming to an end of a human life is both a biological and a social event. From the biological point of view death means the end of the physiological processes which enable the individual to have the capabilities discussed in section 3 and the start of the processes of decay which in time turn a corpse into a skeleton. At the present time the medical definition of death appears to be 'an irreversible coma' and it is pointed out that the end of the functioning of the cerebral cortex is much more important than the end of the functioning of the heart. From the social point of view death means that certain roles become



vacant. Corpses cannot fill any roles, not even that of unconscious hospital patient although perhaps one should remember that cannibals eat them and necrophiliacs have intercourse with them. Modern technology has increased the class of semi-corpses which can fill the role of unconscious patient. The hearts of semi-corpses can be kept going long after their brains have ceased to function. But it remains true that corpses proper cannot fill any role. Most of an individual's role's are easily filled when he dies but some of them such as parent of x, sibling of x and offspring of x may remain permanently vacant. When someone one has known very well dies one may suffer a permanent loss despite the disappearance of the immediate shock and agony caused by the death. Both the corpses and the empty roles produced by death present us with problems. For a short time until decay becomes obvious a corpse has a status roughly mid way between that of a person and a skeleton. People do not worry about how they treat skeletons but they often worry a great deal about how they treat corpses. Decay forces people to see corpses as dead biological organisms rather than as people. Embalming postpones decay often indefinitely and embalmed corpses are often treated with great respect. It should be noted however that, although corpses are treated with great respect in most cultures when they appear singly or in small numbers and until they start to decay, large numbers of corpses are often inevitably treated as waste material of a fairly dangerous kind. If Aunt Agatha dies in her bed the tyranny of social convention forces her corpse into a coffin which has to be taken to either a crematorium or a cemetery. There is no corpse disposal service which will send an official round to remove the corpse in a utilitarian plastic bag to an appropriate incinerator or rubbish dump. But if Aunt Agatha's corpse is simply one of several hundred produced by a large disaster at London Heathrow airport it will, according to one bizarre rumour, find its way

into one of the hundreds of plastic bags allegedly kept for such disasters at a certain establishment. In general the empty roles produced by death are not a problem if no great difficulties are caused when they remain empty for some time. Grave consequences are however likely to follow even a brief vacancy in some roles. The expression, 'the king is dead, long live the king' shows us how the British manage to avoid a vacancy in the role of head of state. Clearly a vacancy in such a role is likely to have fairly serious political consequences. With other roles such as parent of a young child the fact that they never can be satisfactorily filled after the death of the original holder is likely to cause at least some psychological damage to certain people.

Trying to discuss the life history of individuals without reference to roles is in many ways an almost impossible enterprise because their life history is bound up with the chronological roles we looked at in chapter I. Our discussion of childhood in this chapter has really been a discussion of a biological role. What we have said here must be seen in the context of what we said in chapter I. As we have just seen it is impossible to talk about even birth and death without mentioning roles.

### Section 3 - The Capabilities of Individuals

It is traditional to draw a distinction between the rational and the emotional capabilities of individuals. Plato, Hume and many others contrast reason and the passions. Possibly the distinction has been too sharply drawn and emotional factors can enter into so called rational activities but it may still be useful to refer to an individual's cognitive, communicative and linguistic capabilities on the one hand and to his emotional capabilities on the other. We have already discussed CCL abilities.

The emotional capabilities of individuals make society and social life possible. Only if we are capable of taking a friendly interest in others can we engage in group and co-operative enterprises. The autistic person and the psychopath are at the emotional extremes and must be regarded as being on the fringes of humanity. The autistic person has no interest in others and so cannot communicate with them or engage in any kind of enterprise with them. A psychopath may be defined as someone who regards others simply as physical objects which can be disposed of in any way that pleases him. It is not important to know whether or not there are autistic and psychopathic people in the senses in which I have used these terms. These logically possible people simply represent the boundaries of the friendly interest in others which is essential for communication, society and social life. The emotional ability to take a friendly interest in others is only a bare minimum for social life. The ability to go far beyond that emotionally limited and shallow level to intense friendship and love is highly desirable. Indeed an ability to experience the emotional extremes of passionate love, hatred, mourning and rejoicing is probably also highly desirable. These extremes do possibly represent the limits of social and communicative emotional experience as opposed to the anti-social extremes of autism and psychopathy. As we have already seen in chapter III there can be both formal or ritualistic and informal or non ritualistic expression of the extremes of social emotion, e.g. a royal funeral and tearful embracing are formal and informal expressions of mourning.

Human individuals are capable of having private experiences. I do not intend to examine this matter in any detail in this work since I have tried to deal with it in Private Experiences. In the conclusion of that work I wrote :



"It is perhaps appropriate now to have a brief look at the notion of privacy. There are two distinct types of privacy, social privacy and what for want of a better word I shall call mental privacy. This thesis has been concerned with mental privacy which can be either factual or logical. Thoughts, as we have seen, are factually private and dreams are logically private. But although thoughts are mentally private they may be socially public or private. In order to make this point clear let us look at the nature of social privacy. What goes on in bedrooms, bathrooms, and doctors' consulting rooms is private but what goes on in streets, trains and theatres is public, and what is written in newspapers is public but what is written in personal letters is private. A similar sort of distinction is drawn between someone's personal or private life and his public or business or professional life. In other words the differences between social publicity and privacy is the difference between what anyone at all is allowed by social conventions or rules to know or perceive and what only one or more selected people may know or perceive. Thus anyone may see me fully dressed but generally speaking only my wife or my doctor may see me naked and anyone may see my car but only I or my bank manager and his assistants may see my bank statement. If one were studying the distinction between social privacy and publicity for its own sake then there would be a great deal more to be said and one would for instance require to examine the legal distinction between public and private property. But enough has been said for our purposes and the important point for us to see is the relationship between social publicity and privacy on the one hand and mental publicity and privacy on the other. Mental privacy can be found in the most socially public place imaginable and mental publicity can be found in conditions of great social privacy. Thus at a public meeting or in a law court I may keep my thoughts to myself and in a doctor's consulting room I may pour out my innermost secrets, i.e. I may make my thoughts public in the sense of communicating them to my doctor. But what is logically private can never be made public, i.e. only I can have my dreams and my pains. So we see that what is logically private is naturally also socially private yet what is factually private may be either socially public or socially private.

In the chapters on pains and dreams, in the note on consciousness and in the section on images in chapter III a defence of the notion of logical privacy has been advanced. The chapter on thoughts and volitions was concerned with two cases of factual privacy. Finally it should be noted that we have been concerned with only two types of private entity, viz pains and images. Dreams do not involve any third entity for they are successions of images. There are possibly other private entities with which we have not been concerned, e.g. sensations of many kinds and feelings states which may be involved in emotions. But pains and images are probably the most common and precisely identifiable private entities and a discussion of them has I think been sufficient to establish the case for logically private experiences. It is also interesting to note that from the point of view of the philosophy of the person pains and images are essentially unimportant because the fact that a being never experienced either pains or images would not disqualify it for the status of a person. But the study of the philosophy of a person lies completely beyond this work. I have merely tried to

add a most inadequate footnote to the very important work which the leading philosophers of our day have done in the philosophy of mind."

Since we have now seen that emotional abilities are essential to human status the question of the nature of emotional experience cannot be ignored as easily in this work as it was in Private Experiences. A complete account of emotions on the other hand is beyond the scope of this work. In general it is probably best to say that emotions are a matter of a vigorous or extreme behavioural response to a situation which normally at least in retrospect seems to the agent to justify or warrant some such response. An angry man is usually only too keen to tell us what he is angry about and normally expects that we shall at least feel that anger was an appropriate response to the situation he describes. And a mourning man and a rejoicing man are in the same position. In addition to the behavioural response to the situation which can be argued about and regarded as a matter that requires justification there may also be a physiological response such as a flushing of the face which is completely causal and involuntary and cannot involve the question of justification. Panic may be regarded as an extreme type of physiological reaction which excludes behaviour which requires or is capable of justification. As well as the behavioural and physiological aspects of emotion there may also be a subjective feeling state which may be regarded as psychological in the traditional and social work sense of that term and which simple minded people such as the man in the street and his sympathetic insightful social caseworker may regard as all that is involved in the complex question of emotion. The angry man may behave in an angry fashion, exhibit certain physiological responses and simply feel angry. In the case of endogenous depression or euphoria subjective feelings are the cause of behaviour which is not principally a response to any situation in the agent's environment and which must be explained rather than

justified by reference to the subjective feelings. The friendly interest in others which we saw is the minimum emotional requirement for social life does not necessarily involve much if anything in the way of subjective feeling states.

#### Section 4 - Describing individuals

Individuals, both human and non-human, can be described either nomothetically or idiographically; or at least it is possible to argue that they can be. Mr R R Holt in an interesting and important paper entitled 'Individuality and generalization in the psychology of personality' argues against the idiographic approach. At one point he writes 'There can be and is scientific study of all sorts of individuals. Particular hurricanes are individualized to the extent of being given personal names and are studied by all the scientific means at the meteorologist's command. A great deal of the science of astronomy is given over to the study of a number of unique individuals: the sun, moon and planets, and even individual stars and nebulae ..... and no one has ever considered suggesting that astronomy is for these reasons not a science nor that there should be two entirely different astronomical sciences one to study individual heavenly bodies and the other to seek general laws.....' There is a sense in which any study of individuals of any type, either human or non-human, is general rather than particular because most words other than proper names are general in the sense that they are not primarily individuating and ostensive. Once we have said that however we can go on to say that the study of individuals can range from naming which is simply a matter of picking out and distinguishing individuals from each other, if we ignore any social significance it may have to a very detailed knowledge and description such as we find in extensive



biographies. Holt's examples seem to have more in common with names than with biographies. The qualitative differences between one hurricane and another are probably not very great. Indeed if we had a great spate of hurricanes we should probably distinguish between them on basically spatial and temporal rather than qualitative grounds. And astronomy cannot really claim to have begun the study of unique individuals. We are just beginning to explore and understand the moon. The more remote celestial bodies are still almost entirely beyond the reach of our scientific instruments. Telescopes, regardless of whether they are light telescopes or radio telescopes may enable us to make a few guesses about the structure and constitution of planets but really they do not take us much beyond the distinguishing and naming stage. The one planet we know something about, namely the earth, is studied principally in the subjects of geology and geography. If a thorough exploration and study of remote celestial bodies does one day become possible there will be a special subject equivalent to at least the descriptive parts of geography for each individual planet. These idiographic subjects will take us far beyond the meagre knowledge of individual bodies supplied by astronomy. If there are astronomers on some remote celestial body who have picked out the earth with their telescopes they will almost certainly know as little about it as we know about say Saturn.

There are other complex non-human individuals apart from the earth which can help us to understand idiographic knowledge. Large cities, languages, universities roles and historical events are possibly some of the best types of individuals to consider. We can say some general things about cities, universities and certain types of historical events e.g. revolutions but idiographic knowledge is required if we wish to know and understand e.g. London and Paris, the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford and the French and Russian revolutions. Works of art are other

individuals which require idiographic study. Although we can say some general things about novels they do not take us very far if we wish to understand and appreciate 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Dombey and Son' for example. Similarly with languages and roles although we can talk about occupational roles and semitic languages such talk does not take us very far if we wish to achieve any real understanding of e.g. the role of the diplomat and the Hebrew language. We can go further and say that in general idiography is of fundamental importance both for knowledge and action. Unfortunately that fact does not yet seem to be appreciated in philosophy and it is not normally mentioned in epistemology or ethics or the philosophy of action. If however we consider the knowledge and actions of lawyers, administrators and politicians for example it should be obvious how important idiography is. It is a great pity that so far at any rate in philosophy the attention that has been paid to nomotheticity has led to virtually a complete neglect of idiography.

In psychology the great advocate of idiographic knowledge is the late Prof G W Allport. A useful expression of his views can be found in his paper 'The General and the Unique in Psychological Science'. The article can be regarded as an excellent reply to Holt's article as far as it is concerned with psychology rather than with knowledge in general. The following quotation from Allport's article may help to emphasise that point :-

"We forgive Ebbinghaus for performing 163 experiments on himself, since almost immediately his findings were confirmed on other subjects. Luckily these subjects, like him, displayed a logarithmic relationship between the percentage of material forgotten and the time elapsing after the original act of learning. We forgive Kohler and Wallach for intensive work on their own figural after-effects, for it was soon confirmed that others too show a displacement of the percept, after long stimulation, away from the retinal area stimulated.

But imagine the consternation if some deviant psychologist

(perhaps I myself) were to say 'Can't we linger longer with Ebbinghaus and discover in his life what relationships might exist between his memory functions and his motives and his cognitive style and his aspirations?' The objections would be: 'Of what use is that? Even if we find the relationship we'd have to generalize to other people or else we'd have nothing of any scientific value.'

Such is the prevailing 'response set' of our speciality. The intricacy of internal structure in concrete lives seldom challenges or detains us. Our concern is with commonalities and comparabilities across individuals.

This response set is undoubtedly derived from our submissiveness to the goals and procedures of natural science. And this submissiveness is not in itself a bad thing. Up to now it has taught much. The question is whether we have become so enslaved that we overlook an important half of our particular professional assignment which is 'increasing man's understanding of man'.

It does no good to argue that every individual system in nature is unique; every rat, every porpoise, every worm; and that it is only the general laws of their functioning that lead to comprehension. No, we can't take this easy way out of the dilemma. The human system, unlike all others, possesses a degree of openness to the world, a degree of foresight and self-awareness, a flexibility and binding of functions and goals that present a unique structural challenge far more insistent than that presented by any other living system. It is because of their essential stereotype and lack of variation that psychologists like to draw their generalizations from lower animals. But for my part I venture the opinion that all of the infrahuman vertebrates in the world differ less from one another in psychological functioning and in complexity of organization than one human being does from any other."

At the present time there is almost a large and flourishing industry devoted to one type of totally non idiographic description or rather evaluation of people. Social workers who are a quickly multiplying breed very often talk of their clients as immature or much more rarely as mature. There is little doubt that social workers generally think that they are describing their clients when in fact as we shall see they are actually evaluating them. Many psychiatrists and some psychologists also engage in the highly confused maturity business. It is important to notice that although one can qualify and even quantify the term 'maturity' it is nevertheless generally applied to people in a totally



non idiographic fashion. A person may be evaluated as very immature or highly immature or even given a rating on a maturity scale but none of these qualifications or quantifications is even slightly idiographic. Because of the diversity of both actual and possible adult life styles it is probably unwise to use terms like 'mature' and 'immature' with reference to the social and psychological characteristics of adults. But if one is going to use them one should use them as idiographically as possible. One maturity scale can never be sufficient for an adult human being although it may be sufficient for a tree, a wine or the human physique. Before we go any further with the matter it might be a good idea to look at the meaning of the word 'mature'. According to Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary it means 'fully developed: perfect: ripe'. The other meanings given are not relevant to this discussion. The verb 'to mature' (intransitive) is defined as 'to come to or approach ripeness, full development or perfection'. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of 'mature' as 'complete in natural development, with fully developed powers of body and mind'. Drevers Dictionary of Psychology does not list the word 'mature' but defines 'maturation' as 'in general biology, the attainment of maturity, or the completion of growth; in psychology, rather the process of growth and development itself as contrasted with the learning process'. Perhaps one can say that 'mature' is basically a biological and an evaluative term. When we describe anything as perfect or as having reached perfection we are being highly evaluative. On the other hand when we describe something as fully developed we are being comparatively descriptive. We must note however that although it is easy to reach agreement about what constitutes full development of a plant or an animal or the human body it is not at all easy to reach agreement about what constitutes such development of the psychological and social characteristics of people.

One might reasonably expect that if any psychologist is likely to talk sense about the concept of maturity it would be G W Allport. And certainly although Allport's account of maturity is very disappointing it is by the standards of the subject extremely good. In his book 'Pattern and Growth in Personality' Allport devotes chapter 12 to 'The Mature Personality'. He begins the chapter by saying (p 275)

"Our long survey of the development of selfhood, of motivation, of cognitive styles brings us at last to the crucial question: What is the mature personality like?

8 We cannot answer this question solely in terms of pure psychology. In order to say that a person is mentally healthy, sound, mature we need to know what healthy, soundness, and maturity are. Psychology alone cannot tell us. To some degree ethical judgement is involved."

But in fact it is not at all clear why the question 'What is the mature personality like?' arises at all or why it is alleged to be crucial. When Allport admits that ethical judgement is involved in answering the question he should see that there are possibly as many answers to the question as there are people. Anyone who feels that his answer is decidedly better than those of others is claiming to be not a psychological but a moral expert in a sense in which there cannot be moral experts. On the next page Allport writes (p 276)

"Different cultures have somewhat different conceptions of healthiness. In some regions the only "sound" person is one who loses himself completely in following the traditions and advancing the welfare of his tribe. In the Western world the standard places more emphasis on individuality, on realizing one's own personal potentialities.

Fortunately in Western culture there is considerable agreement on the norms for soundness, health, or maturity (we shall use these terms interchangeably."

We have not been given any evidence to support the sweeping claim that

in Western culture there is considerable agreement on the norms for soundness, health or maturity. It is very doubtful if there is any such agreement. In addition Allport here makes it perfectly clear that he is dealing with social and cultural convention and ideals. People may decide to pick and choose amongst such ideals or they may decide to reject the lot. Allport it would appear simply wishes to be the champion of his type of Western culture. Any definition of human maturity is simply a formulation of one set of values. Matters become very clear when Allport brings the word 'soundness' into the discussion. It is perhaps possible to imagine that one is being descriptive if one calls someone 'healthy' or 'mature' but calling someone 'sound' is clearly an evaluation.

Allport goes on to say (p 276)

"Today we witness a great burst of interest in this problem. It is discussed up and down, before and behind, by psychologists, psychiatrists, and by others. The burst of interest is due in part to the acute menace of mental disorder and emotional ill-health that alarms all nations today. In part also the interest springs from a desire to discover common values among sound mortals as a groundwork on which to build a more peaceable world society."

The sentence about the 'acute menace of mental disorders' is simply alarmist. There is no attempt to show that mental disorder has recently increased. It would in any event be rather difficult to prove an absolute increase in mental disorder since mental illness statistics like crime statistics are capable of various interpretations. The whole concept of mental disorder or mental illness raises considerable problems that Allport does not either mention or consider. These problems are seen at their simplest in cases in which several people take the view that someone is mentally ill but the person concerned totally disagrees with their opinion. Such a situation is comparatively



common in the field of so called mental illness but is much less common in the field of physical illness and should make it fairly clear that talk about mental illness is necessarily different from talk about physical illness. The idea that 'sound mortals' can give us 'a more peaceable world society' is naive and simple minded. Conflict in society is caused principally by the clash of economic, political, racial, territorial and ideological interests and has remarkably little to do with the soundness or otherwise of individuals. After advancing that absurd claim for maturity Allport appears to see the futility of the whole enterprise for he writes (p 276)

"The distinctive richness and congruence of a fully mature personality are not easy to describe. There are as many ways of growing up as there are individuals who grow, and in each case the healthy end-product is unique. Although in this chapter we seek universal criteria of wholesome adult lives, we must never forget the wide play of individuality of pattern."

Better still he writes (p 276 - 277)

"It is questionable whether we should ever expect to find in the flesh a paragon of maturity. We shall be talking more about an ideal than about an actual person."

It follows from that quotation that 'maturity' like 'saintliness' is primarily a moral and an evaluative and not a descriptive concept. Indeed we can say that just as many Victorians under the influence of religion aimed at saintliness so many people at the present time under the influence of social work and psychiatry aim at maturity. Both saintliness and maturity are ideological ideals. The ideology of social work is generally the ideology of conformism.

If Allport actually understood some of the things he has said so far chapter 12 of his book would stop at the last sentence we quoted

from it. But unfortunately he does not seem to understand exactly what he has said and so the chapter continues and a few lines further on from the last quotation Allport writes (p 277)

"One terse definition says that a healthy personality actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly. Such a personality stands on his own two feet without making excessive demands on others. So far as it goes, this definition is satisfactory."

But what is highly ambiguous cannot be satisfactory. If by 'perceiving the world correctly' one simply means not suffering from visual or auditory hallucinations or from colour blindness and simply seeing physical objects as they really are all is well. The phrase 'perceiving the world' might however refer to social and ideological perception in the sense in which one man might say that British society is fascist and another might say that it is communist. Both these extremists and all the middle of the road men who disagree with them would want to claim that they perceive the world correctly. Deciding who is right in this matter is a question of individual moral and evaluative decision based on a consideration of what one regards as the relevant evidence. Neither psychology nor the concept of maturity can help us here. Immediately after the passage we have just discussed Allport writes (p 277).

"A fuller set of criteria is offered by Erikson, who specifies the period of life at which each attribute is (or should be) normally achieved:

Infancy: a basic sense of trust  
Early childhood: a sense of autonomy  
Play age: a sense of initiative  
School age : industry and competence  
Adolescence: personal identity  
Young adult: intimacy  
Adulthood: generativity  
Mature age: integrity and acceptance."

Industrious school children are doubtless what many parents and teachers want but it would be unfair to ignore the large number of working class children who find school boring and repressive and so are not industrious in that setting and it would also be unfair to label them immature. Many of these male children like their fathers have a strong dislike of spending the working day indoors. They strongly prefer open air occupations to any type of indoor work. Sometimes working class adolescents who disliked school say that they hated sitting in a classroom at a desk with books in front of them. Such children may of course be very industrious at pursuits such as football which they enjoy. In any event the ideal of industry and competence during the 'school age' can be regarded as a piece of Victorian morality. Furthermore the whole concept of 'the school age' requires examination. Infancy is certainly a universal feature of human life and so almost certainly is play but going to school is not. Universal compulsory schooling was established comparatively recently in certain societies but it has never been established in others. Its establishment raises considerable moral problems which were debated in Britain in the nineteenth century and which have been brought to our attention again recently by certain people who are sometimes called deschoolers. Whatever one's moral position on compulsory universal school attendance may be it is clear that one cannot talk about 'the school age' if one is concerned with some kind of universal human nature. Possibly certain social anthropologists would want to point out that adolescence is no more universal than the school age. In other words Erikson is simply expanding a particular set of values which have meaning only in certain societies. What he says about the later stages of life is no more satisfactory than what he says about the earlier stages. Vast numbers of young adults are certainly concerned with intimacy and vast numbers of adults are concerned with generativity but neither young



adults nor adults will survive unless they are concerned with many things, besides intimacy and generativity. Also some young adults are quite happily not concerned with intimacy and some adults are quite happily not concerned with generativity. If 'acceptance' in the 'mature age' means acceptance of the social status quo it is to be hoped that at least some people are able to emulate Bertrand Russell's ability to see many of the faults of the existing social order until his dying day.

In the middle of the chapter we see Allport at his very best and his very worst as far as handling the topic of maturity is concerned. At one point he comments on a piece of imaginative psycho-analytic theorising about sex from Erikson which runs as follows (p 286-287).

"Psychoanalysis has emphasized genitality as one of the chief signs of a healthy personality. Genitality is the potential capacity to develop orgasmic potency in relation to a loved partner of the opposite sex. Orgasmic potency here means not the discharge of sex products in the sense of Kinsey's "outlets," but heterosexual mutuality, with full genital sensitivity and with an over-all discharge of tension from the whole body..... The idea clearly is that the experience of climactic mutuality of orgasm provides a supreme example of the mutual regulation of complicated patterns and in some way appeases the potential rages caused by the daily evidence of the oppositeness of male and female, of fact and fancy, of love and hate, of work and play. Satisfactory sex relations make sex less obsessive and sadistic control superfluous."

Allport's comment in that passage is excellent and really cannot be improved within the context of the idea of maturity. He writes (p 287)

"Persuasive as the argument is, we are nonetheless aware of exceptions. It is not proved that every genitally mature individual is healthy in all regions of his life. Nor is it clear that sex drive is so closely tied to all regions of the personality as the theory requires. Finally, there are the innumerable instances of celibates, both male and female, and even of sexual deviants, whose accomplishments and whose conduct are so outstanding that we cannot possibly consider them as "immature.""

What, then, shall we conclude? It seems wise to admit that in many lives genital maturity does accompany general personal maturity. At the same time, we cannot possibly maintain that mature people experience no frustrations and no deviations in handling their drive impulses, including the ramified impulses of sex. The difficulty here seems to lie in identifying adult motivation almost exclusively with the sex-drive. One can readily concede that such an important drive, if handled in a mature way, may well harmonize with, and reinforce, general maturity, without at the same time reducing the entire problem of maturity to genitality."

The first of these two paragraphs is possibly the more important of the two. In it Allport criticises Erikson's ideas from an idiographic point of view and so from a point of view which is able to appreciate the wide variety of possible adult life styles. Very unfortunately Allport does not at any stage show that he is aware of the conflict between his own idiographic principles and the whole idea of human maturity. From time to time as in the above passage he shows an implicit awareness of the conflict. At other times even an implicit awareness of it is entirely lacking. And sometimes we come across almost unbelievable nonsense. Allport writes (p 287 - 288)

"We readily note the difference between the person who has emotional poise and one who is emotionally clamorous and who gives way to outbursts of anger and passion - including overindulgence in alcohol and obsessive outbursts of profanity and obscenity. The egotist, the roue, the infantile person have not passed successfully through the normal stages of development. They are still preoccupied with bits and pieces of emotional experience.

Many writers speak of self-acceptance. This feature of maturity includes the ability to avoid overreaction to matters pertaining to segmental drives. One accepts his sex drive and does the best he can to handle it with the minimum of conflict in himself and with society; he does not constantly seek the salacious and the scatological, nor is he prudish and repressed. Everyone has fears, both of immediate dangers and of ultimate death, but these can be handled with acceptance. If not, there develops a neurotic preoccupation with the danger of knives, of high places, with health foods and medicines, with self-protective superstitions and rituals".

Possibly Allport should have kept these comments for his own children instead of publishing them. They could possibly form part of a headmaster's sermon in a school chapel. But they are not a contribution to public knowledge although they do show us how almost inevitably personal tastes and prejudices creep into anyone's account of maturity. What one thinks of profanity, obscenity, heavy indulgence in alcohol and of all things health foods is very much a matter of private opinion and of very little if any public interest. Allport we know was religious and so profanity may in some ways have been a problem for him but it really cannot be a problem for a non religious person.

The worst however is yet to come. On page 290 Allport writes

"Here we should add a word concerning "economic maturity". For most people the struggle to earn a living, to remain solvent, to meet fierce economic competition is a major demand of life. It causes strain and begets crises often more devastating than the crises of sex and self identity. College students do not always estimate correctly the challenge they will face when they enter into competition for the dollar. Youthful personalities sometimes seem relaxed (even serene) prior to their ordeal of the market place. To be able to support oneself and one's family (in America with an ever-advancing standard of living) is a frightening demand. To meet it without panic, without self-pity, without giving way to defensive hostile, self-deceiving behaviour is one of the acid tests of maturity."

Here Allport is stating his belief in American capitalism and in the 'fierce economic competition' of the American market place. Why that belief should have anything to do with maturity is not at all clear. In any event in this passage Allport seems to come very near to the extreme social work view one sometimes meets that the cause of poverty is emotional inadequacy. In certain cases this may of course be true especially in conditions of full employment. But in general the causes of poverty are purely economic. One explains the grim poverty of millions in India by reference to the economics of underdeveloped countries and



not by reference to the individual characteristics of Indians. Similarly one explains the different unemployment rates in different parts of the UK by reference to the regional structure of the UK economy and not by reference to any difference in psychological characteristics between eg. Glaswegians and Londoners. The point is almost painfully elementary but one can meet social workers who are confused about it and Allport's unfortunate passage about 'economic maturity' might very well increase their confusion.

At the end of the chapter we find Allport's usual mixture of the ability to see what is wrong with the concept of maturity and at the same time a wholly uncritical acceptance of its absurdities. One page 305 he writes

"An important postscript to this brief discussion should be added. Is maturity the only ultimate "good" value for personality? Do we not all know immature people who are highly creative, heroic in special ways, and possessed of other desirable attributes? It seems that especially the value of creativity is present in many lives that are otherwise warped, retarded, even neurotic and psychotic. And the world needs creativity. We must concede this point, and admit that there are many good things in life beside soundness and maturity of personality. We can yield on this matter, but still maintain as a generally desirable goal the development of personalities toward the highest attainable level of maturity. We shall always fall short of this goal, but when we do so, fortunately many sound values remain".

In this passage Allport comes very near to saying that the maturity is of comparatively little importance. And he also comes very near to saying that universal maturity would lead to a decline in creativity. Accordingly the sentence which begins 'We can yield on this matter ....' is unsatisfactory because the possibility that universal maturity would lead to a decline in creativity calls into question the value of Allport's 'generally desirable goal'. Perhaps one should really say that 'we shall always fall short of this goal but fortunately because

we do many sound values remain'. When Allport says that 'there are many good things in life besides soundness and maturity of personality' it is really necessary to establish some kind of hierarchy of values in order to make it clear just how important maturity is supposed to be. On the last page of the chapter we find the following passage (p 307)

"Psychologists cannot tell us what normality, health, or maturity of personality mean. Yet every practical-minded person, including psychologists and psychotherapists would like to know. Surveying some of the vast literature on the subject, we find considerable agreement, at least so far as the value-conceptions of Western culture are concerned. In particular we find six criteria that sum up the area of agreement. The mature personality will (1) have a widely extended sense of self; (2) be able to relate himself warmly to others in both intimate and nonintimate contacts; (3) possess a fundamental emotional security and accept himself; (4) perceive, think, and act with zest in accordance with outer reality; (5) be capable of self-objectification of insight and humor; (6) live in harmony with a unifying philosophy of life".

Of the points Allport mentions possibly (1), (4) and (6) call for some comment. (1) is really unintelligible as it stands since it is quite impossible to say what it means. The word 'self' is nearly always difficult to understand and it is certainly a great deal more difficult than usual to understand in (1). On pp 283 - 285 Allport discusses a topic called 'Extension of the Sense of Self'. As far as one can judge from that discussion the phrase 'extension of the sense of self' may simply mean 'not being too self centred'. If that view is correct then (1) simply means 'will not be too self centred' and that is unobjectionable and unremarkable. Unfortunately some parts of the discussion on P 283 - 285 are very far from clear. The story about 'Citizen Sam' does not really prove anything and the best reply to Allport's question 'What precisely is wrong with Sam?'. (p 284) may be 'Absolutely nothing, he may be perfectly happy' (4) on P 307 raises the problem of 'outer reality' which is in many ways the same as the problem of 'perceiving the world

correctly' which we discussed earlier. The Christian and the Communist doubtless both feel that they 'perceive, think and act with zest in accordance with outer reality' but they perceive think and act very differently from each other. (6) is perhaps the most questionable of a very questionable series of points. On p294 Allport writes 'maturity requires, in addition to humor, a clear comprehension of life's purpose in terms of an intelligible theory. Or, in brief, some form of a unifying philosophy of life.' It seems that by 'a unifying philosophy of life' Allport means some kind of religion or ideology. It is however possible to argue that all religious and ideologies give a distorted view of the world and that it is best as far as possible to remain free of them all. Unfortunately Allport does not expand the point about the value conceptions of Western culture. It certainly cannot be claimed that there is only one admired adult life style in western society at the present time but it appears that Allport is trying to suggest that there is. And it is not remotely clear why we should concern ourselves with only western values.

In Allport's discussion of maturity we have come across a strange mixture of criticism and acceptance of the idea of maturity. His critical passages should lead him to reject the idea entirely but unfortunately they do not and at times as we saw he lapses into unfortunate moralising based on personal prejudice. The essentially arbitrary nature of any psychological or psychiatric definition of maturity can be seen if we look at a definition which owes nothing to either psychology or psychiatry. One suspects that many people at the present time would doubt if such a definition were possible or could possibly make sense. Theological definitions of maturity do however exist and within their own terms and on their own assumptions they undoubtedly make sense. Prof John Macquarrie is one of the leading English speaking liberal



Protestant theologians of the present time and in his book 'Three Issues in Ethics' he gives us a theological definition of maturity which runs as follows (p 109)

"The Christian, we have seen, defines mature manhood in terms of Jesus Christ, and especially his self-giving love. But Christ himself is no static figure, nor are Christians called to imitate him as a static model. Christ is an eschatological figure, always before us; and the doctrine of his coming again "with glory" implies that there are dimensions of christhood not manifest in the historical Jesus and not yet fully grasped by the disciples. Thus discipleship does not restrict human development to some fixed pattern, but summons into freedoms, the full depth of which is unknown, except that they will always be consonant with self-giving love".

Judged from a purely secular point of view this definition has a lot to recommend it because it lays emphasis on the idea of not restricting human development to a fixed pattern. In many ways it is as good if not better than Allport at his best. It is liberal in the best tradition of liberal Protestant theology. From our point of view however its main value lies in illustrating that definitions of maturity are all inevitably subjective in the sense that they are formulations of their authors' basic beliefs and values. Erickson's definition of maturity is a reflexion of his belief in a certain school of psycho-analysis and Macquarrie's definition is a reflexion of his theological position. Somewhat ironically Macquarrie may have greater insight or self awareness than Erikson since he makes it clear that he is talking within the framework of Christianity and about Christians. Often psycho-analysts give the impression that they think that their beliefs should apply to everyone and not just to those who believe in psycho-analysis which may at times be a less tolerant ideology than certain types of Christianity. Anyone who wants a definition of maturity should compile his own and apply it only to himself. Naturally of course one can if one wishes adopt

a definition compiled by someone else if one feels that it adequately reflects one's own beliefs and values. But precisely why anyone should actually want a definition of maturity is not perhaps entirely clear.

In this chapter we have considered human individuals from both idiographic and nomothetic points of view. Our talk about the human life history and about human capabilities was entirely nomothetic. But then we saw that our understanding and evaluation of particular human individuals must be idiographic. At this stage a critic of role theory might want to suggest that an emphasis on the importance of roles for an understanding of human action cannot be combined with a belief in the importance of an idiographic approach to human individuals. Although we have already noted that individual roles must be understood idiographically it is true that role explanations of human action are primarily nomothetic. They tell us for instance how all butlers and librarians normally behave. It might seem therefore that they cannot help us when we are faced with the strange behaviour of the few butlers and librarians that most of us know. The main answer to our problem are role style, the idiographic features of the particular instance of the role in question and the roles other than librarians or butler held by the individual we are considering. A general knowledge of the role of librarians can take us so far but it cannot take us far enough if we are considering the behaviour of librarians at such institutions as the London Library, University College Oxford, the Prison Service Staff College and Edinburgh University. It cannot be easy to be a librarian in a library which has sections on such grim topics as capital punishment, sexual deviation and physical education. At University College Oxford matters are complicated because the librarian is likely to be a fellow in some unfortunate subject such as ancient history.

Perhaps we should end this chapter by saying something about the

centre and fringes of humanity in relation to the general concerns of this part of the work (chapter IV and V) as well as in relation to popular definitions of humanity and even in relation to Hitler's definition of humanity. The popular definition of humanity would seem to be a biological Homo sapiens birth to death definition. In other words all who are born of Homo sapiens parents and only those born of such parents are completely human from at least the moment of birth to the moment of death. The difficulties posed for this definition of humanity by such problems as autism, psychopathy, infancy, senility, mongolism, severe brain damage and prolonged comas are so great that it is hardly surprising that some people have sought to involve metaphysics to justify it. According to what is possibly the most popular metaphysical justification of the definition souls appear on the scene when Homo sapiens conception takes place and hang around until death. Unfortunately there are no good reasons for believing in the existence of any metaphysical entities. Hitler had a narrow and exclusive definition of humanity which involved excluding certainly Jews and possibly others from the human race. In this work we have proposed an inclusive definition of humanity which recognises the possibility of non-biological people. Also we have seen that each Homo sapiens individual starts life beyond the fringes of humanity as a purely biological foetus and then moves towards the centre of humanity through infancy and early childhood. Senility may take an individual out to the fringes of humanity before death. Apart from accidents and disease senility may produce comas or severe brain damage which take individuals prematurely to the fringes of humanity. An awareness of one's own journey from the fringes to the centre of humanity and also of the possibility that one may at any moment through accident or disease move suddenly to the fringes once again should I think make



one much more interested in expanding rather than contracting the boundaries of humanity.

## Chapter VI

### ACTION

#### Section 1 - Approaching and Ignoring Roles

In the Introduction we said that in order to understand what people are we must understand what they do. All our talk about roles has been very much concerned with action but it is now time to bring out the full implications of that talk. Before we do that however we must look at the strange field of philosophy that is known as the philosophy of action. Since we are writing within what can be called a philosophical context it is necessary to see if there is any relationship between the role theory account of action and what philosophers have said about action. One of the fundamental points of this work is that human action cannot be understood without the use of the concept of a social role. From the point of view of philosophy that claim is a very bold one because the philosophy of action attempts to explain human action without making use of that concept. It cannot be said that the philosophy of action is a primitive or an undeveloped field of philosophy. On the contrary it is both complicated and sophisticated. The complexity arises from the fact that a consideration of action involves several other major topics notably causality, freedom of the will, teleology, motives and intentions. The sophistication arises from the vast amount of attention which has been devoted to the field in recent years. It is possible to say that in the philosophy of action roles are approached but never quite reached. Let us therefore examine the philosopher's approach to roles.

A common starting point for discussions of action is limb movements. What is the difference between moving one's arm and one's arm moving is a common question. Alternatively the starting point can be a deliberate muscular contraction though presumably such a contraction is normally envisaged as taking place in a limb muscle. Actions are sometimes distinguished from limb movements because it is rightly pointed out that the same limb movements can be used for different actions and that conversely an action can be carried out by different limb movements. In order to understand the difference between limb movements and actions motives, intentions circumstances and consequences are brought into the picture. The point is made that we must look at them rather than at muscular physiology if we wish to understand what people do. Activities such as playing tennis are regarded as a rather special case and it is argued that we can never begin to understand what tennis players are doing unless we understand what tennis is, i.e. know its rules etc. Actions which are not strictly rule governed are said to be comprehensible if viewed in their social context but at this point the line of thought peters out in a somewhat vague and unsatisfactory sort of way. The last paragraph of Mr A I Melden's paper entitled 'Action' shows the end of the line of thought admirably. He writes :-

"There are cases, of course, in which sentences are employed in describing the behaviour of our fellows and in which there is no ascription of responsibility. I have already mentioned the language of coroners and physiologists, in which a position of neutrality is taken with respect to the responsibility of the individual. But in what sorts of cases of an admittedly responsible agent would the question of common practices including that of observing moral rules be irrelevant? Would it be a case in which the individual raises his arm? But in that case we must not describe what the individual does as signaling, saluting, leading others in physical exercise drill, and so on. For these descriptions at once bring us within the social arena in which common forms of life have been achieved and by reference to which action statements can be understood and bodily movements treated as actions. No, we shall even have to deny that in raising his



arm the individual was even pretending to engage in these activities, exercising, following the instructions of his physician, and so on. We shall have to rest content with the statement that he was simply raising his arm and never mind any further queries. But in that case, when the individual raises his arm what happens is that a bodily movement, not an action, occurs."

The development of this line of thought which I propose is that instead of talking rather vaguely about the social arena in which common forms of life have been achieved we should talk about roles. If one understands the relevant role one can normally understand what the person in question is doing. And in order to understand a role one must understand other roles as well because one cannot understand what one person is doing without understanding what other people are doing. The tennis example is really much more illuminating and of much wider importance than is commonly realised. Tennis players engage in a rule governed activity which involves a setting namely the court and equipment namely balls and raquets being used in a certain way. And what one player does is not comprehensible without reference to what the other players do. The role of tennis player implies the role of tennis opponent and may imply the role of tennis partner. But most human activities can be seen as analogous to games like tennis with the proviso that they are not so tightly rule governed and the verbal element may very well be very much greater. Consider for example retail work or office work. The setting and the equipment are important in each case and the role of shop assistant implies the role of customer and the role of secretary implies the role of boss. One cannot understand what a shop assistant is doing unless one appreciates the significance of money and merchandise and understand what customers are doing. Equally one cannot understand what a secretary does unless one understands what an official letter is and what files and records

are and what managerial activity is because bosses engage in that activity to a greater or lesser extent.

It might be appropriate to consider another passage from writings on the philosophy of action in the light of the remarks above. Even although the passage has been written without direct reference to the concept of a role it may nevertheless be possible to clarify it with the aid of that concept. In his book Human Acts Dr Eric D'Arcy quotes an example given by Prof J J C Smart (pp 2-3). In the example a US sheriff shot a man in special circumstances. D'Arcy gives twelve possible descriptions of the sheriff's act.

- "1 He tensed his forefinger.
- 2 He pressed a piece of metal.
- 3 He released a spring.
- 4 He pulled the trigger of a gun.
- 5 He fired a gun.
- 6 He fired a bullet.
- 7 He shot a bullet at a man.
- 8 He shot a bullet towards a man.
- 9 He shot a man.
- 10 He killed a man.
- 11 He committed a judicial murder.
- 12 He saved four lives."

Later on (p 10) D'Arcy supports the view that 'There is not necessarily one and only one correct description of a given act'. He goes on to say 'The description of an act appropriate to a given occasion may vary with the specialized interest of the inquirer or narrator.' It may be more illuminating to say that it can vary with the role of the inquirer or narrator. D'Arcy goes on

"a person who is being introduced to fire-arms for the first time, and learning to shoot, may have got as far as loading and cocking the gun, holding and aiming it, and crooking his right forefinger on the trigger. Later he happens to be watching a newsreel film of the execution, and sees the sheriff carry out the movements

which he himself has learnt; then there is a report, and the negro falls; and he asks, 'What did the sheriff do after he got his hands and fingers right?' The answer, 'He tensed, or suddenly squeezed, his forefinger', would then be perfectly in place. Again, a student of elementary ballistics may know that the bullet is driven out of the barrel by the gases which are suddenly released when the cartridge explodes, and that the cartridge is exploded by the sudden impact of the hammer upon it; but why did the hammer make such an impact when the sheriff pulled the trigger? The answer will begin with an explanation of the way that trigger and hammer are connected by a spring-mechanism, and conclude with some such words as, 'So you see, when he pulled the trigger he released the spring.' "

The questions and answers given by D'Arcy are best understood if we consider the roles of both the questioner and the respondent and their relations. 'What did the sheriff do after he got his hands and fingers right?' is asked in D'Arcy's example by a trainee marksman and the answer 'He tensed or suddenly squeezed his forefinger' is the answer given by a shooting instructor. Knowing someone's roles is a valuable clue to understanding his interests and questions. By itself the question does not suggest the type of answer required or its implications. Perhaps the sheriff had recently been released from hospital where he had been treated for a complaint which required extensive physiotherapy and occupational therapy. A physiotherapist may have been watching his shooting with professional interest and if she were asked 'What did the sheriff do after he got his hands and fingers right?' she might reply 'He moved his weight on to his right foot, held on to the back of a chair with his left hand and it was clear that his co-ordination had greatly improved.' Alternatively the physiotherapist like the shooting instructor might reply 'He tensed or suddenly squeezed his forefinger' but the implication of her remark would be very different from those of the shooting instructor. D'Arcy develops the example further by suggesting that a student of elementary ballistics might ask why the hammer made such an impact when the sheriff pulled the



trigger. And the answer we are told might end with some such words as 'So you see, when he pulled the trigger he released the spring.' But if the question had been asked by a representative of the manufacturers of the gun who was concerned not with the general principles of ballistics but with the performance of his firm's guns compared with those of other firms the answer might be very different. Such a person might say something such as 'Because we have started to use new very powerful springs which greatly improve the performance of that model' or 'Because we have worked hard to produce a gun which does not require a lot of pressure on the trigger. Even a child could use that gun.' Again both the question and answer given by D'Arcy could be given in a lesson not in ballistics but in physics. Since ballistics is presumably a branch of applied physics the differences between a physics lesson and a ballistics lesson might not be very great but they would none the less be important. The frame of reference of ballistics is guns and that of physics matter and energy. In ballistics one sees as it were types of guns but in physics one sees guns as types of machines. Accordingly the roles of physics instructor and physics student differ from the roles of ballistics instructor and ballistics student.

D'Arcy gives an example which is one more illuminating from our point of view a few lines further on where he writes :-

"Think of a clerk still at his desk two hours after the time that the office usually closes. To the question, 'What are you doing?', he may give different answers to different inquirers. For instance, to his wife on the telephone he may say, 'I'm working late'; to the manager of the firm, 'I'm finishing the Blair contract at the request of the Department Head'; to the Department Head, 'I'm just beginning the last clause'; to a policeman who has noticed a light burning unusually late, 'It's quite all right, Officer, I work here'; to a trade union official, 'It's all right, I'm getting double rates for working overtime'. Each of these different answers may be perfectly true and, according to the particular concern of each questioner, perfectly appropriate."

The questions and answers in this example are clearly role governed. To say that the clerk may give different answers to different inquirers is to say less than one should. He gives different answers to different categories of inquirers. If all his inquirers were e.g. policemen he would probably give much the same answer to each. And the categories are defined by the relevant role relationship to himself. In our society wives expect to have their husbands' company after working hours and so the clerk's wife expects to be told why her normal expectations are being frustrated. Employers are likely to be concerned when staff who are paid over time for late work continue working after their normal finishing time and so it is not surprising that the clerk avoided blame by mentioning the instructions of the Department Head. Expenditure on overtime has probably got to be justified by the appropriate Department Head so it is not surprising that he is concerned with the clerk's rate of progress. Policemen are required to take a suspicious view of people in work places after normal working hours so the clerk's reply to the policeman is designed to allay suspicion. Likewise the role of trade union official in relation to the role of trade union member explains the last answer in the example. D'Arcy's comment that each of these answers may be perfectly appropriate according to the particular concern of each questioner is not as illuminating as it might be because the particular concern of each questioner in this example is determined by his or her role and not by individual whims and fancies.

At times philosophers come so close to talking about roles that it really is almost impossible to understand why the next extremely obvious and one would have thought really inevitable step of actually talking about them is not taken. A very clear example of this situation is provided by Dr Donald Davidson in his paper 'Action, Reasons and Causes' where he writes :-

"When we ask why someone acted as he did, we want to be provided with an interpretation. His behaviour seems strange, alien, outre, pointless, out of character, disconnected; or perhaps we cannot even recognize an action in it. When we learn his reason, we have an interpretation, a new description of what he did which fits it into a familiar picture. The picture certainly includes some of the agent's beliefs and attitudes; perhaps also goals, ends, principles, general character traits, virtues or vices. Beyond this, the redescription of an action afforded by a reason may place the action in a wider social, economic, linguistic, or evaluative context. To learn, through learning the reason, that the agent conceived his action as a lie, a repayment of a debt, an insult, the fulfilment of an avuncular obligation, or a knight's gambit is to grasp the point of the action in its setting of rules, practices, conventions, and expectations."

At the end of the passage instead of talking about 'rules, practices, conventions and expectations' Davidson should simply have talked about roles. He has after all given us a simple description of roles in the words of his we have just quoted. Only an uncle can fulfill an avuncular obligation and only a chess player can produce, if that is the word, a knight's gambit. The agent could conceive of his action as the fulfilment of an avuncular obligation or as a knight's gambit only if he occupied the role of uncle or of chess player. One might just possibly want to talk of the roles of debtor, liar or insulting person but it is much more likely that we would want to place debts, lies, and insults in a wider role context. There may in some ways be a difference between insulting a bus conductor and insulting one's wife. Similarly there may be difference between telling lies to the espionage agents of foreign powers and telling lies to one's valet.

A somewhat different example of not paying sufficient attention to roles can be found in the writings of Prof Alasdair MacIntyre who certainly cannot be accused of ignorance of sociology. In 1971 the BBC broadcast a series of radio dialogues entitled 'Conversations with Philosophers'. These dialogues were later published in The Listener



and later still as a book. In the number of *The Listener* dated 25th February 1971 a dialogue between Prof MacIntyre and Mr Bryan Magee was published under the journalistic and highly questionable title 'Alasdair MacIntyre talks to Bryan Magee about political philosophy and its emergence from the doldrums'. At one point in that dialogue MacIntyre said

"The work of the later Wittgenstein, the work of Austin, the work of Professor Hart - all these bring out the need for patient descriptive labour in answering the question of how concepts of different kinds are used, of how the widely ranging vocabulary of political and social life is deployed. Austin showed us how what some have taken for minute differences between negligence, inadvertence, and irresponsibility of other kinds, can be extremely important in characterising the way in which an agent's intentions was or was not embodied in his actions on a particular occasion. These descriptive labours result, of course, in reports of how people do actually use discourse, and therefore they have an empirical basis. They provide some of the data which we need if we are to return to the problems of classical political philosophy. At the core of such inquiries, both of the later Wittgenstein and of Austin, there is the large general question of how we do and how we ought to characterise what a man is doing when he does something. How do we distinguish between his action and its effects, consequences and results?. Notice that the notions of effect, consequence and result are by no means the same notion. This whole family of questions raises the issue of how to understand the actions of ourselves and others in our social relationships. Thus, what contemporary philosophy has brought us to is a realisation that we do not as yet understand how to understand what we are doing in those elementary social relationships which are relationships of everyday action and everyday conversation, just because we have not yet adequately clarified our basic concepts."

It seems obvious that one of the basic concepts that must be involved here is that of a social role because roles provide the structure of 'those elementary social relationships which are the relationships of everyday action and everyday conversation.' If it is surprising that MacIntyre does not mention roles at that point it is a great deal more surprising that he does not mention them later on in the dialogue when

he turns his attention to sociology. He says :-

"At this point in the argument it is profitable to consider the condition of sociology. Sociologists have gathered a great quantity of data and provided us with large amounts of not hitherto available information. Yet this accumulation of data - so great an accumulation that we have more facts than we know how to cope with - does not have its meaning written on its face. I suggested earlier that the social sciences do not just as a matter of fact seem to be able to formulate any laws in the way in which the natural sciences do. We do indeed very often make factual discoveries in sociology, but these factual discoveries tend to be of the same order as the factual discoveries that we make in ordinary life, and do not derive from any kind of understanding specific to the social sciences. So we may learn, for instance, as one European sociologist has discovered, that in passing sentence on criminals, some judges at least tend to have more regard to the social class of the criminal than they do to the nature of the offence. What follows, what generalisations can be framed, we are not at all clear, because we are not at all clear how we should understand the phenomena of a legal system in such a way as to be able to generalise about them. This is in part because we are not clear at what level we should be looking for a theory: a theory of evaluative behaviour in general, or a theory of legal behaviour, or a theory of the behaviour of officials such as judges? How ought we to group together the phenomena of social life? How ought we to categorise them in such a way that we can begin to frame explanations? We do not know."

Perhaps we do know that we should start with roles. Indeed we have started with roles roles because we have talked of judges and criminals. If we are considering evaluative behaviour in general and human action is what is being evaluated then it is essential to know about the roles of the person who evaluates and the person whose action is evaluated. Since the role of judge is a middle class role it is hardly surprising if some judges tend to react to middle class criminals in one way and to working class criminals in another possibly quite different way. The behaviour of judges is probably quite different from the behaviour of trade union officials when they are evaluating the actions of trade union members and so on. Those who want to consider legal behaviour must pay attention to legal roles and their relationships. Such people

will note for example that the shortest route to the bench in England lies through prosecution rather than defence work and that in Scotland the Lord Advocate tends to recommend himself for elevation to the bench. Above all those who want to study the behaviour of 'officials such as judges' must pay close attention to roles so that they may learn that in the UK at any rate judges are not at least in theory, officials in one sense of the term at all. And they really are sui generis although there are a lot of quasi judicial characters in many places. In defence of MacIntyre it could be said that he might consider my point too obvious to be stated. He may perhaps in a sense be pointing out that a consideration of the relevant roles does not tell us which theory to adopt. At the same time it is important to state that roles are the essential foundation of all the theories and that there really is no question of adopting one theory and discarding the others. Each one of the theories is potentially as useful and as valuable as the other two except perhaps the third. Which theory anyone adopts at any given time will depend on his interests and on the nature of his enquiry.

One of the strangest examples of a philosopher ignoring roles is to be found in Prof Alvin I Goldman's book 'A Theory of Human Action'. In the preface to that book he writes:-

"As is evident from the problems that occupy most of my attention, the book is aimed primarily at a philosophical audience. But it should also be of interest to behavioral scientists. First, any inquiry into human behaviour faces the problem of choosing appropriate units of behaviour. The principles of act-individuation and act-interrelation I propose may prove useful for social science as well as for philosophy. Secondly, after elucidating the role of wants and beliefs in our everyday explanations of human action, I spend some time discussing the extent to which our common sense model of action accords with the sorts of models and theories of action found in the behavioural sciences. At first glance, common sense and behavioural science seem to be miles apart. But I contend that there is less incompatibility than initially appears between explanations of the sort sought by behavioural scientists."



And Chapter V is entitled 'Explanations of Actions in the Behavioural Sciences'. Because of what he says in his preface and because of the title of Chapter V it would be reasonable to expect that he would be bound to discuss sociological explanations of action and therefore to consider social roles. In actual fact however Goldman totally ignores both sociology and roles. Evidently by the phrase 'behavioural sciences' Goldman means just one behavioural science namely psychology. On p 129 Goldman writes :-

"I shall defend the thesis that most of the prominent studies and theories of behaviour in the social sciences are not really incompatible with the commonsense model elucidated in Chapter three and four. On my view, much of the work done in the behavioural sciences either presupposes concepts quite similar to those of wanting and believing or frames hypotheses which are compatible with the operation of wants and beliefs. The fact that an hypothesis makes no reference to wants and beliefs does not entail that its truth would preclude the causal role of wants and beliefs. Hence, even those theories in the behavioural sciences which ignore mentalistic or teleological factors need not be incompatible with commonsense explanations which reply on such factors.

Needless to say, there is no room in a single chapter to discuss all or even a significant proportion of the relevant literature in the behavioural sciences. The best I can do is select representative studies to illustrate the points I wish to make."

If one is claiming to discuss 'representative studies' from the field of 'most of the prominent studies and theories of behaviour in social sciences' in relation to wants and beliefs one has absolutely no academic justification whatsoever for ignoring sociology in general and role theory in particular. Sociology is at least a paradigm case of a social science and it really is very difficult to argue against the very much more extreme view that it is the primary and fundamental social science. In addition one cannot understand wants and beliefs without discussing the roles which play such an important part in

shaping peoples wants and beliefs. Also it is not possible to use the phrase 'social sciences' to mean 'psychology' unless one is trying to use some sort of private language. The question 'How is it possible for someone to ignore sociology in general and role theory in particular in the manner and in the circumstances in which Goldman has ignored them?' is not a purely philosophical question because Goldman does not try to justify his omission, rather it is a question which involves the sociology of knowledge. The answer would seem to be that philosophical and psychological explanations of action are linked because they both individualise social phenomena and so a philosopher who discusses action is likely to have much more in common with a psychologist than with a sociologist. The important topic of individualising social phenomena is discussed in the General Conclusion. Perhaps we can rest for a second from academic matters and enjoy the amusing irony of the situation in which I came across Goldman's book quite by accident in the sociology section of Foyles bookshop in London. Whoever placed it there made a double mistake.

Before the almost painful end of this section two matters should be mentioned. Firstly it has to be said that from the philosophical point of view these philosophers such as Professors Emmet, Downie, Mayo and Mr Cohen who have paid at least some attention to roles are very strange eccentrics. Secondly certain questions asked by Mr Urmson help us to see yet again the importance of roles in understanding action although that is most certainly not what Mr Urmson had in mind when he asked the questions. In his paper entitled 'Motives and Causes' Urmson considers eight questions which may be asked about an action viz.

- "1 What was the point of his doing that?
- 2 What was his reason for doing that?
- 3 What led him to do that?

- 4 What prompted him to do that?
- 5 What made him do that?
- 6 What possessed him to do that?
- 7 How did he come to do that?
- 8 How did it come about that he did that?"

It is easy to imagine answers to these questions which will refer directly to roles. Urmson however gives answers to specific instances of these questions which appear at first sight to have nothing whatsoever to do with roles and which therefore might appear to support the view that roles are not essential to the understanding of action. His specific questions with his answers to them are :-

"1a Q What was the point of his buying a slow-combustion stove?

A To save coal.

2a Q What was his reason for buying a cheaper model?

A He could not afford the better one.

3a Q What led him to undertake so many offices?

A Vanity. (One may also be led, or even spurred, by ambition, or anxiety, or pride).

4a Q What prompted him to clean out his desk?

A Noticing that his papers were getting dirty.

5a Q What made him sell on a falling market?

A Panic. (Or stupidity).

6a Q What possessed him to strike a woman?

A Blind fury. (Or ungovernable rage, or an evil demon, possibly).

7a Q How did he come to take up law?

A His father was a solicitor.

8a Q How did it come about that he emigrated?

A Well, it is a long story. The Australian Government ...."



But the answers assume role situations without which they are not really totally comprehensible. We need to know why someone wanted to save coal. Perhaps his pay forced him to economise and so his poorly paid occupational role is the relevant context of his action. Alternatively it might be the case that there was a national coal shortage and the government had issued an appeal for severe restraint in the use of coal. In that case his action is explained by reference to his conscientious performance of the duties imposed on him by the role of citizen. If a man strikes a woman we desperately need to know their role relationship. In order to understand the blind fury we need to know if a man was striking his wife or his mistress or a policewoman or if a patient was striking a nurse. Also we need to know the precise circumstances of the event within the context of the role relationship. Perhaps the policewoman was trying to arrest the man or his wife had announced that she was going to leave him. And roles are equally relevant to the answers to the other questions.

It is necessary to end this section on a cruel note. The strangeness of some of the philosophy of action has been shown quite unintentionally by a philosopher. In his book 'The Campus War' Prof John Searle explains certain human actions in order to make them comprehensible to people in general and particularly to those concerned with or interested in universities. The manner in which he does this is not unlike the manner in which philosophers explain the strange examples given in papers and books on the philosophy of action for the academic edification of other philosophers. Indeed Searle shows us implicitly and quite by accident that explaining human action and contributing to the philosophy of action often are totally unrelated activities. The separation of the two activities arises from the fact that the examples in some works on the philosophy of action are generally

speaking most unlikely to be given in answer to such questions as 'What did you do yesterday evening?' or 'What did he do yesterday evening?' which are the kind of questions that people actually ask about what people do. In reply to such a question it is quite possible to answer 'I took part in a demonstration on the campus' or 'He took part in a demonstration on the campus'. In 'The Campus War' Searle is concerned with the world in which that sort of answer is given to that sort of question. That world is far removed from the world of the type of philosophy of action where we find Goldman writing (op cit Preface PV) 'What is an act? What is the relationship between act and agent? Is John's flipping the switch identical with his turning on the light? If not, how are they related?' The world of that type of philosophy of action is the world of arm raising, switch flipping and nose scratching. It is often not the world of taking part in demonstrations or going shopping or buying a pair of shoes or phoning a friend or taking a bath. Indeed at times it is not even the world of arm raising and switch flipping. When I was a postgraduate philosophy student at Oxford I knew a sound man from Cambridge who took much the same sceptical view of the philosophical activity around him as I did. Once he returned from the Lower Gondal Room of the Indian Institute in a somewhat distressed state and alleged that he had sat through a philosophy seminar devoted to a discussion of coughing and sneezing. At first I simply assumed that he had wandered into a physiology seminar by mistake but he told me which philosophers had taken part and what they had said. One would not wish to say that there are no philosophical points to be made about coughing and sneezing but rather that they are comparatively minor. All would have been well if at a less subterranean level than the Lower Gondal Room important topics such as roles were being discussed but they were not. And it did not

occur to me to stop drinking coffee and reading newspapers and to start a discussion of them. The concept of collective responsibility is an uncomfortable one and will not be discussed here.

In order to understand the relationship between the world of the philosophy of action and the world of talk about what people actually do it is necessary to consider the question of time scale and also the analogy of the relationship between motor parts and cars. If one asks someone what he did two seconds ago one might very well get an answer such as 'I turned on the light' or even 'I flicked the switch' or 'I scratched my nose' or just possibly 'I coughed' or 'I sneezed'. The question is however an odd one and is as unilluminating as the question 'What did you do as a child?' More usual and more illuminating questions about action would be 'What did you do in the afternoon?' or 'What did you do yesterday?'. One cannot say exactly what the most illuminating part of the action time scale is but in general one can say that the two extreme ends of it are generally speaking not very illuminating. Certainly one can say to a retired person. 'What did you do before you retired?' and after someone dies one can simply say 'What did he do?' The conventional type of answer to such questions consists of naming the major occupational role involved and so we get answers such as 'I was a belly dancer' and 'he was an astrologer' But the most honest and accurate if unilluminating answer would simply be 'many things'. At the other extreme there are situations in which there is either a temporary or a permanent shortage of water. In such situations turning on and turning off water taps are extremely important major actions and so statements such as 'Two seconds ago I turned on the tap' can sometimes be important. But in general we are unlikely to understand human action if our time scale uses either too small or too large units. And if someone says that limb movements are the components of human action and that we cannot understand action unless we first understand its components then he needs to consider the important analogy of the relationship



between motor parts and cars. The expert on motor parts is not necessarily an expert on cars and vice versa. Although clearly the expert on cars needs to know something about motor parts is is perhaps not quite so essential for the expert on motor parts to know something about cars. The specialist in the philosophy of action is rather like the expert on motor parts. Being an expert on limb movements and possible answers to the question 'What did you do two seconds ago?' is similar to being an expert on hub caps. Doubtless there is a great deal more to know about hub caps than most of us appreciate and certainly specialists in the philosophy of action have shown the complexity of limb movements in relation to possible answers to the question 'What did you do two seconds ago?' But if we want to know about cars we must go to someone who knows about the workings of the internal combustion engine and if we want to understand possible answers to the question 'What did you do yesterday' we must go to someone who knows about social roles.

Before we actually start to consider Searle's book there is a small point of academic ethics that perhaps has to be considered. Some people might wish to say that an academic's non academic writings should not be considered in an academic context. According to such a view if one is considering Prof R Wollheim's academic work one does not take into account his popular and totally uncritical book on Freud. Clearly if a philosopher happens to be a keen gardener and writes a book on gardening one would not normally take it into account if one is considering his academic work. Even if in the course of the book the philosopher happens to remind us how illogical it would be to cultivate weeds and what it means to say that the effluent from the Oxford sewage farm is good effluent and hence possibly good fertiliser for one's garden we would still not consider that the work was of any academic importance. One can give practical advice about gardening techniques without touching on any philosophical problems. But any

rational discussion of Freud's work must inevitably involve a consideration of types of explanation of human action and of questions concerning proof and evidence in relation to theories. Similarly if one is explaining any human action such as participation in campus demonstrations it is inevitably possible to ask what type of explanation is being given and a consideration of types of explanation of human action is a philosophical matter. Indirectly Searle's book raises philosophical issues. It is however a great pity that the philosophical issues are raised only indirectly.

In his book Searle adopts Goffman's approach to the study and explanation of human action in the sense that he does not carry out empirical research but instead tries to provide a coherent and convincing explanation of what he has observed. His most general thesis is that the students who were involved in the 'student revolts that spread across the United States, France and England, beginning at Berkeley in 1964' (p 11) were engaged in religious or quasi religious activity which was aimed at converting the university into a youth city. Inevitably Searle has to talk about roles but only once does he do so explicitly when he writes (p 163 - 164)

"It is, I believe, humiliating, degrading, and above all frustrating for a man of twenty-eight, with a wife and two children, to be, into the indefinite future, a 'graduate student'. These not-so-young men are raging about the ineffectual position they have placed themselves into. Much of the desire for 'student power' comes from grown men and women who, as they would put it, want to have a share in making the decisions that affect their lives. The role of the students, in so far as the university remains an intellectual community with a clear role division between faculty and students, is likely to deny them any effective decision-making power in the areas in which they most demand it. Their position is paradoxical: they are at an age and level of maturity where they want and are ready for positions of leadership and responsibility, but they have chosen a role - that of the student - which is precisely one that does not and cannot confer leadership and responsibility. It is designed as a transitory role; they have made it a role of indefinite duration.

The Sources of an impending eruption are apparent in this alone."

At many other places in the book Searle writes implicitly about roles.

A good example is to be found on pp 124 - 126 where we find Searle saying :-

"A second feature of the academic liberal mode of sensibility, one which infects the academic profession generally, though liberals to an unusual extent, is that its possessors are not in the habit of considering the consequences of academic actions. The professors' most important actions as professors have few consequences of a practical or political kind. The basic actions of the faculty member, the core of his professional activity so to speak, lie in teaching students and conducting and publishing research. In each case he seeks to impart the truth or as nearly what is the truth as he can get according to professional standards of evidence and reason. In each case what matters is the quality of the content of his utterances, and not the consequences of the act of uttering them. He would regard it correctly as a violation of professional ethics if he made his utterances for the purpose of achieving some practical effects rather than for the purpose of communicating the truth. Not only does he not consider the consequences of his actions when making utterances but would consider it somewhat immoral to do so.

When he goes to a meeting of the faculty to vote on some resolutions about a campus crisis, he takes this habit of mind to the meeting with him. When a resolution is proposed, he asks himself, 'Do I agree with the resolution?' He then listens to the speeches pro and con, makes up his mind, and if he agrees with the resolution he votes yes, if not, he votes no. It is an engaging exercise in political innocence, and would be completely commendable if it were not so easily manipulated by those with more political sophistication. When faced with such a political situation, the intelligent person has to ask himself at least three questions: not only 'Do I agree with the contents of the resolution?' but also 'What are the consequences of our passing it?' and 'Do I regard them as desirable?' A political situation is precisely one in which it is incumbent on one to consider the consequences of performing one's speech acts, as well as the content of the speech acts performed.

Consider how this works in actual cases. At the height of Stage Three, when the police are still on the campus, the stench of tear gas remains in the air, and everyone is aroused, an emergency meeting of the faculty is held. A group of left wing professors, prepared in advance, will propose a resolution which, among other things, condemns the administration for calling the police. The average faculty member, 'le professeur moyen sensuel', as it were, asks himself, as he should, 'Do I think it was a good idea to call the police?' But he does not ask himself, as he should,



'What are the long-and short-term consequences to ourselves, the administration, and the university in general of our publicly condemning the administration at this particular point in the history of the university?' and 'Do I welcome those consequences?'"

Another example is to be found on p 106 where we read :-

"An entirely unnecessary and artificial adversary relationship is created by the existence of an independent administration. This is most strikingly obvious to the faculty member who accepts an administrative post. He suddenly discovers that the attitude of his faculty colleagues to him has changed. He may think he is in the administration to defend their shared values, and he may think of himself as primarily a professional scholar, but his colleagues think of him as having 'stepped over the line', as one professor once put it to me. The administrator becomes one of them and is no longer one of us."

On p 162 we find yet another example where Searle writes of 'the endless, tiresome, and humiliating trial by publication and patience endured by the assistant professor before he is recognized as a fully fledged member of the intellectual community, the period in which his elders and betters 'look him over'

It is interesting to see what precise use Searle makes of philosophy in his book. In general he makes very little use of it except for occasional matters of elucidation. We have already noted that in P 125 Searle says inter alia, 'A political situation is precisely one in which it is incumbent on one to consider the consequences of performing one's speech acts, as well as the content of the speech acts performed'. In a similar sort of way from the point of view of elucidation we find Searle saying on p 130 :-

"The faculty cannot forgive<sup>207</sup> the administration for giving in on matters of principle in order to increase the probability that the university will benefit from the sacrifice in the

long run. The administration cannot forgive the faculty for their insistence on their principles without any regard of the consequences. Technically speaking, the faculty are deontologists; whereas the administrators are teleologists, usually act utilitarians. The faculty member asks, 'Is it in accordance with my principles?'; the administrator asks, 'How does it affect the future of the university, will it work to our benefit in the long run?' "

Possibly Searle's most elaborate point of philosophical elucidation is to be found on p 145 where he writes :-

"My epistemological upbringing forces me to say that in this area - as in, say, the study of history - any causal analysis must have a residue of speculation simply because there is no direct way to test the hypotheses. You can read the statistical data of the American Council of Education or the Center for the Study of Higher Education or the various opinion surveys until you are dizzy, but they do not by themselves yield up the causal answers. Not only does one have the usual difficulty that there is no discovery procedure for getting from the data to the right hypothesis, but even after you invent a hypothesis that fits the data you have no direct way to test the hypothesis. You can only look for more data, and that usually means you wait to see what happens next. What I have tried to do is provide a causal story that fits the data I have seen, and more importantly fits my own experiences. I shall proceed by baldly listing about a dozen of the more important causal factors, and then I shall try to show how they add up."

Finally we should note that at one point Searle makes a semi philosophical comment which is valuable and illuminating. On pp 156 - 157 he writes :-

"In short, the dominant tradition in our high culture is one of being against authority. We celebrate the rebel but not the bureaucrat, the revolt but not the institutions. Instead of teaching our young to see freedoms (and when you use the plural, you force yourself to look at concrete examples) as necessarily presupposing stable and established institutions, we teach them to see freedom (the unmodified singular is a largely meaningless abstraction) as being constantly at war with authority and institutions. As long as forces for institutional stability are powerful, this kind of ideology is a useful counterweight; but in periods of institutional instability it produces unexpected results (such as, for example, the Terror of 1793-4). Mill is a good example of the kind of philosopher who wrote

against a background of Victorian institutional stability and smugness, and defined the problems of liberty accordingly. De Tocqueville, who had experienced social instability, was more aware of the institutional character of freedoms, and in consequence his writings emerge as more ambiguous but more profound."

Indirectly Searle's book sheds a lot of interesting light on the philosophy of action. It enables us to see clearly that the relationships amongst action, explanations of action and the philosophy of action are most unlike the relationships amongst natural phenomena, explanations of natural phenomena or simply science and the philosophy of science. Science is the study of natural phenomena and the philosophy of science is the philosophical study of science and its presuppositions. It could perhaps be argued that part of the philosophy of action is similar to and indeed part of the philosophy of science. If one regards psychology as the study of human behaviour then that part of the philosophy of action which is the philosophical study of psychology is also part of the philosophy of science. Unfortunately some philosophers still seem to be living in a world in which the claim that psychology is the scientific study of human behaviour has not been challenged by sociology and so we find that sociology is not considered in the philosophy of action but only if at all in the philosophy of science. Presumably such philosophers consider that sociology is the study of something called society and has nothing to do with the study of individual human action and behaviour. Apart from the philosophical consideration of psychology however the philosophy of action also consists of a consideration of what is alleged to be ordinary language talk about action. The philosopher's claim to study ordinary language has always been totally suspect. If one wants to find out what ordinary language is one must carry out a vast amount of



empirical research. The ordinary language studied by philosophers is at best the ordinary language of philosophers and at worst it is a language of its own, the language of philosophical examples. It is strange that philosophers examples are always examples of middle class and not working class language. And it should be remembered that the work of Prof Bernstein has shown us that working class language is not simply a colourful and ungrammatical version of middle class language. A serious study of ordinary language could not possibly ignore working class language. In my experience borstal boys for example do not try to excuse themselves by saying that they acted accidentally or inadvertently in the way that the so called ordinary chap who swerves in his Austin car in order to avoid duck rabbits is supposed to excuse himself. It should be noted that we are here talking about the kind of Austin cars that are red and green all over. In minor disciplinary proceedings with borstal boys I have found that they tend to use the one word 'habit' as a general excuse. And so if one asks Jones why he hit Brown one is likely to get the reply 'habit sir' pronounced in such a way that one is likely to cause much amusement by one's puzzled response 'who is Abbot?' Any serious study of ordinary language would have to pay a lot of attention to the working class habit of ending a statement with a question. Thus if I say to a borstal boy 'Where is your girl friend?' he may very well reply 'She's in Holloway, isn't she?' Prison officials and many others hear that type of question at the end of a statement endlessly but it is very difficult to be sure of its meaning. Perhaps it means 'as one would expect' or 'as everyone knows' or 'and that's a satisfactory state of affairs.' Certainly it is not in any sense a genuine question. Such gloriously plebian matters were not discussed during the endless hours spent on linguistic and so called 'ordinary language' philosophy during my undergraduate

days. In fairness to my tutors however I must record that one of them did teach me the meaning of the phrase 'a winged beater' which I had imagined had something to do with engines and machines. Now perhaps one can see that parts of the philosophy of action are highly unsatisfactory and are based on serious mistakes and confusions. On the other hand one must remember in fairness to the better parts of this field of philosophy that particularly where it shares common ground with moral philosophy it deals with major problems which are only slightly affected by the points made in this chapter.

In this section we have seen that at times writers in the field of the philosophy of action come very near to a consideration of roles but for some strange reason they never seem to reach that point. We have also seen that certain writings of philosophers in this field are considerably illumined when the inevitable but unfortunately only implicit references to roles they contain are made explicit. Goldman and Searle both figure prominently in this section because Goldman shows us a dangerous form of philosophical blindness and confusion and Searle presumably unwittingly shows us the irrelevance of much of the philosophy of action to the explanation of action. In general perhaps we can say that the philosophy of action tends to ignore the essentially group nature of action especially in an industrial and bureaucratic society. Philosophers examples tend to be unduly individualistic. Most people are probably aware of the change from individual to group action in the field of scientific invention and discovery. In the past an invention or a discovery was usually made by one particular person. But now the individual inventor or discoverer has been replaced by a team of scientific workers. Joint authorship of papers in academic journals is evidently the rule rather than the exception in the scientific world. After the first British heart transplant several newspapers carried

photographs of the group of people who were given the credit for the work. Although there was one man in the centre who was regarded as the prime mover in the operation the team was a large one and included anaesthetists, technicians, nurses and hospital administrators. And what is true of heart operations is true also of most human activity. Family life, work and leisure account for most of most peoples lives and in each of these fields it is extremely difficult to understand what one person is doing without understanding what others are doing. The study of roles makes this clear because it is impossible to understand one role without also understanding other roles related to it.



## Section 2 - The Language of Action

It is now time to try to make explicit what has been implicit from the very beginning of the work. Action, we can perhaps now see is communication and roles are the language of action. 'Communication' is difficult to define but we can call it 'conscious interaction'. It is not relevant to our purposes to enter into a discussion of the concept of unconscious communication or interaction except to note that it is parasitic on the concept of conscious communication. All paradigm cases of communication are certainly cases of conscious communication. Talk about communication tends to be limited to distinguishing between verbal and non verbal communication and tends to stop short of pointing out that both verbal and non verbal communication take place in a state of integration or opposition within the framework of social roles. There must be a language of action because when we act we want at least some people to understand at least something of what we are doing. Precisely who these people are and how much of what we are doing we want them to understand depends on our roles and on theirs. A doctor for example may act in such a way that nurses understand much more of what he is doing than patients and his medical colleagues much more than nurses. We have already discussed the notion of linguistic secrets and what was said about them can also be said about non linguistic or at least partially non linguistic secrets.

Roles serve the same function as language in the sense that just as in order to understand what someone is saying we must first and foremost understand the language he is speaking so in order to understand what someone is doing we must first and foremost understand the roles he is occupying. Knowing something about the speaker's or

actor's individual characteristics is helpful but of entirely secondary importance. It is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of understanding what the speaker is saying or the agent is doing. Certainly everyone has a language style and a role style but style is parasitic on language and roles. Perhaps it is just possible that someone might want to argue that a language of action is unnecessary because actions can always be explained and described in language. There are both practical and theoretical objections to this idea. From the practical point of view life would simply grind to a rather horrible linguistic halt if actions had to be explained and described before they could be understood. One can for example imagine what it would be like if whenever a motorist saw a man in the middle of the road wearing a certain kind of uniform and waving his arms about the motorist had to stop and go up to the man and ask what he was doing. The resulting traffic delays would be quite considerable because it requires a certain amount of time to explain exactly what policemen do in relation to traffic and why they do it. At an early stage in life we learn a great deal about common roles and a lot of the learning involves verbal descriptions and explanations from parents, teachers and others. In order to understand the importance of roles one really needs to be able to recapture something of the child's sense of wonder and confusion when faced with adult activity. Young children are amazed by what goes on in shops and in streets because they do not understand the roles of the people who are to be found in such places. Possibly the only adults who can really see human action in the way that young children see it are anthropologists when they are carrying out field work. We can say that for children and anthropologists human action can seem as confusing and incomprehensible as a foreign language one does not know. From the theoretical point of view descriptions of

action are in many ways as inadequate as descriptions of language. If one wants to know what German is like one has simply got to learn the language and to use it. Reading accounts of the German language is really no use at all. Similarly if one wants to know what a role is like one has got to occupy it. Many of us for example have ideas and possibly suspicions about what the police do but unless one has been a policeman for a reasonable length of time one is most unlikely to know in any satisfactory sense of the term what policemen actually do. The issue is not solved by sending academic researchers into police stations because although such people might discover a great deal they are also likely to be effectively prevented from seeing and understanding a vast amount of what policemen see and understand. Even if one wants to know how the police treat motorists one has got to drive around to find out. As far as roles are concerned the gap between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance is very great indeed. All accounts of roles, even when they are as honest as possible are more or less misleading or inadequate. In his book (op cit) Searle gives an excellent account of some aspects of the role of an American university administrator under the somewhat optimistic section heading 'What It is Really Like'. Part of that section runs as follows :-

"A third feature of the life of the college executive is its persistent unpleasantness. As he walks about the campus, people shout obscene insults at him; his office is haunted both by hysterical radicals and irate citizens, he is portrayed in the newspapers both on and off the campus as a fool or a knave or both. Not the lightest of the crosses he has to bear is the monthly regents' meeting.

The students the professor deals with in his classes are, for the most part, a joy to be with. They are bright, lively, intelligent, and often eager to learn. The students the top-level combat administrator deals with tend to be a different breed altogether. Many of them are in a frenzy of hatred, and normally the college authorities are the targets of the hatred. A sizeable percentage of the revolutionary extremists I have



dealt with have been clinically ill; and this is not my lay judgement, but is based on discussions I have had about them with university psychiatrists, and on the medical histories of some of them. In situations of social instability people who are themselves messed up psychologically can attain positions of great prestige and prominence. It helps in dealing with extreme radicals to have a therapeutic attitude."

Despite the excellence and liveliness of Searle's account of the role however there can be little doubt that only by becoming a university administrator in America rather than by reading his book can one discover 'what it is really like'. At this point we should in passing note what a pity it is that Searle did not consider the very important philosophical and practical problems raised by the concept of mental illness particularly in relation to radicals, militants and universities. Mr S Maddison's paper Mindless Militants? Psychiatry and the University is now required reading in this field. One gets the impression that Searle adopts a very uncritical attitude to the views of psychiatrists.

At the beginning of this work we noticed that analogies are sometimes important. Now we are considering an analogy between language and action. There are three important points to be made about this analogy. Firstly one cannot take this analogy too far. One can make a variety of synchronic and diachronic analyses of language which have no equivalents in role theory. It would not for example be very wise to look for role equivalents of words and sentences nor for role equivalents of written and spoken language. There might on the other hand be role equivalents of dialects. Possibly language games provide one of the most important if not the most important meeting points and points of similarity between language and roles. Only if one understands the roles of the participants can one hope to understand a language game. Generally speaking language games are also action games

and in these cases the importance of roles is extremely obvious. But even if a language game is simply a discussion which involves virtually no non linguistic action we are unlikely to be able to understand it unless we understand the relevant roles. It is perhaps difficult for example to understand the remark 'Edinburgh, this is London. Can you help me to Crail?' unless one knows that it was made by a telephone operator who was speaking to another telephone operator despite the fact that there was absolutely no non linguistic action involved in that language game. Secondly one must remember that language is simply a part of roles in the sense that linguistic action is part of the totality of action which consists of both linguistic and non linguistic action. And roles are the language of the totality of action. Any attempt to study language apart from its social context or in other words apart from roles is extremely myopic. At the same time we must bear in mind, thirdly, that both roles and language exist in the context of culture. It is not exactly easy to say what culture is but here we are using the term in the social anthropological rather than in the artistic sense and so we might perhaps describe it as the totality of ideologies, social customs, science, technology, artistic activities and political and economic structures and activities to be found in one place at one time. Ideally only when one understands the relevant culture can one understand roles and only when one understands roles can one understand language in anything other than a very limited way.

In the Introduction we pointed out that this work is concerned with synoptic and synthetic statement and not, except perhaps incidentally, with analytic argument. Now we can see very clearly the difference between the synoptic and the analytic approach to the study of action. If we ask what action is or what in the most general sense,

people, or perhaps persons, do then there can be little doubt that the synoptic answer to the question is much more meaningful and illuminating than the analytic answer. The synoptic answer is that they communicate with each other, sometimes in order to achieve certain purposes and ends and sometimes simply because they enjoy communicating with each other. Human communication can be either an end in itself or a means to the achievement of other ends. The extreme analytic answer would seem to be that they produce limb and muscle movements or perhaps willed muscular contractions. From our undergraduate days we can all remember how ridiculous it would be to ask someone how many volitions he had before breakfast or indeed before any other meal. For very different reasons it would be equally ridiculous to ask someone how many limb or muscle movements he had produced before breakfast. Talking about willed contractions would certainly not make the situation any less ridiculous. Asking someone what he had done before breakfast would be a very different matter and would be likely to be understood and to produce a sensible answer. Saying that action is a matter of limb and muscle movements is like saying that speech is a matter of the movements of the speech organs such as the lips and the tongue. Most people are aware of what they say but generally speaking only speech therapists, actors, phoneticians and teachers of speech and drama are aware of the movements of their speech organs. Similarly most people are aware of what they do but generally speaking only ballet dancers, gymnasts, athletes and teachers of physical education are aware of their limb and muscle movements. We must note in passing that it is possible though comparatively difficult to be aware both of what one is doing and of one's limb and muscle movements just as it is possible but equally difficult to be aware of what one is saying and of the movements of one's speech organs. Just as a knowledge of the workings of the internal



combustion engine is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of knowing how to drive or of understanding driving so a knowledge of limb and muscle movements is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of knowing how to act or of understanding action despite the fact there is no driving without a functioning engine and no action without muscular movements.

The analytic view of action is so strange that it is interesting to enquire into the reasons and causes behind it. The reasons are the mistaken assumptions behind the analytical and atomistic approach to philosophical problems. The main assumption is that understanding is a matter of analysis and not synthesis. It is simply unwise to be doctrinaire about this matter. Both analysis and synthesis have a part to place in knowledge and understanding. We may say that biologists should concern themselves with both ecology and biochemistry. But they should not confuse one with the other. In the same way philosophers should not confuse the philosophy of action with the philosophy of limb and muscle movements. Perhaps we can now see why we said in the Preface that the philosophy of action is part of social philosophy. The causes of the analytic view of action may not be very important but we may note in passing that they may arise out of the activity of sitting at a table writing philosophy. When one is sitting at a table one's arms and hands are the most prominent parts of one's body in one's own field of vision. One's feet and legs and possibly also at least one's lower trunk are hidden by the table. Only one's hands, arms, head and neck are likely to move very much and the movements of the hands and arms are the most prominent in one's own field of vision. It is perhaps because of factors such as these that questions such as 'What is the difference between moving my arm and my arm moving?' have come to be regarded by some as central to the philosophy of action. More

accurately reasons and causes have probably combined to produce intense philosophical myopia which can quite easily be cured by the study of synthetic and social philosophy.

There is nothing new under the sun and certainly not in philosophy. Although we have just spent a page or two trying to expound the notion of the language of action Miss Iris Murdoch accomplished the task in two sentences when she wrote in her paper 'The Idea of Perfection' (The Sovereignty of Good p 20) 'I can decide what to say but not what the words mean which I have said. I can decide what to do but I am not the master of the significance of my act'. She could equally well have said 'I can decide what to do but not what the actions mean which I have done' La Rochefoucauld also seems to have been perceptive in this field. Searle writes (op cit p 71) 'La Rochefoucauld says somewhere that few people would fall in love if they had never read about it. Part of what he means by that is that the possession of the dramatic category, falling in love, makes possible certain sorts of experience which would not be possible or would be different without that category'. Perhaps that remark can help us to see that just as language makes perception and thought possible so roles also help to make them possible. Knowing someone's role enables us to see what he is doing. And knowing about roles enables us to think about action and about possibilities of action. Similarly both language and roles make communication possible. The idea of action as language is a very old one and is certainly a great deal older than the idea of language as action. Much has been said in recent years about performative utterances but for centuries people have spoken of the language of action. In Christian theology the incarnation is called God's supreme act in history and is also called God's word. St John's gospel has much to say about the matter.

It is necessary to redraw the map of philosophy, or at least a corner of it. We began the task in the Preface where we tried to indicate a few points in the area of social philosophy which is a region that is not explored in our deplorable universities. Now it should be obvious why the philosophy of action in the sense in which we have been using the term at the end of this chapter must be placed in the field of social philosophy. The branch of philosophy which is commonly called the philosophy of action is however a totally different matter. At the beginning of this chapter we talked about the philosophy of action in that sense of the term and part of it should be renamed the philosophy of limb and muscle movements. There can be little doubt that the philosophy of limb and muscle movements is not part of social philosophy. Strictly speaking the philosophy of action can also be called the philosophy of communication and it consists of role theory and the philosophy of language which is of course a very different matter from linguistic philosophy. The philosophy of the person links the philosophy of action or communication with moral philosophy and philosophical psychology or the philosophy of mind

Perhaps we should end this chapter by looking at a puzzling passage in the paper by Mayo which we considered in chapter II. At one point he writes :-

The concept of role is irreducibly sociological; it cannot be reduced to elements of individual behaviour or belief. To describe someone's behaviour in terms of a role is never merely to describe, but to give a condensed explanation of his behaviour. Take, for example, the role of bus conductor. No conjunction of statements about an individual's beliefs and actions can amount to a description of what he does as a bus conductor; the qualifiers 'as', 'qua', 'in his capacity as', are essential. And his actions qua bus conductor can be understood only in terms of other people in other, correlative, roles, such as passenger, driver, or manager.

Now although a role is not reducible to behaviour and belief on the part of an individual, it most certainly enters into an individual's behaviour and beliefs, especially into his beliefs about his own behaviour, his thinking about what he is



doing.

I cannot pretend to understand exactly what Mayo is saying here. It is not clear what he means by 'actions' in this passage but it looks very much as if he means limb or muscle movements. In addition it is always difficult to draw a sharp dividing line between description and explanation. For some reason which is not at all clear Mayo seems to think that the fact that roles elucidate the links between what one person does and what others do counts against the idea that roles enable us to describe actions. The opposite point of view would seem to be much more reasonable since what one person does is closely involved with what others do. The last sentence of Mayo's that we have quoted does seem in certain respects to run counter to the paragraph immediately before it. In rejecting what Mayo says as far as it can be understood it is necessary to notice that in an indirect sort of way he gives us clues about what we should say. We should say that the concept of action is irreducibly social, it cannot be reduced to elements of an individual person's behaviour or belief because what one person does can only be understood and described by reference to what others do. As we have already seen the same points can be made about language and about what one person says in relation to what others say.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

### Individualising Social Phenomena

Perhaps we can now see that a person is an individual and his roles. A biological human individual starts as a fertilised ovum and ends as a skeleton. A biological person starts with birth when his roles start and ends with death when his roles end. At the present time it is rather difficult to say much about the individual element of non biological people except that it might very well be electronic. As we have from time to time pointed out in the course of the work it is not really possible to separate an individual and his roles. One might say that a person is the totality of an individual and his complete role history. Our definition is both prescriptive and descriptive. Aristotle's definition of man as a political animal has certain features in common with our own which may be regarded as part of a tradition in which emphasis has been laid on the biological and social aspects of people. Other traditions have been concerned with metaphysical entities such as minds and souls. Although it can be claimed that there are descriptive elements in the definition it is also to a large extent prescriptive. It should be noted that there is a certain element of repetition in the definition because one cannot define a role without making some reference to the individual who actually or potentially occupies the role.

Throughout the work we have tried to do justice to the social dimension in human life by paying close attention to role theory. There is a strong tradition which ignores and in effect denies the social dimension in human life. We can say that those who support that

tradition individualise social phenomena by trying to explain by reference to the characteristics of individual people what can only be satisfactorily explained by reference to social factors and structures. Two examples may help to make matters clear. It is sometimes said that since there is a high divorce rate in Sweden and a nil divorce rate in the Republic of Ireland it follows that the people of Sweden are much more moral or whatever than the people of Eire or vice versa depending on one's point of view. In actual fact however divorce is not allowed by the laws of the Republic of Ireland and is easily allowed by the laws of Sweden so a comparison of the divorce rates of the two countries does not tell us anything directly about the characteristics of the individual citizens of these two countries but does tell us something about their legal and social structure. Explaining the divorce rates by direct reference to the characteristics of the individual citizens of the countries concerned is a case of individualising social phenomena.

The second example is much more philosophical. At one point in the paper of his to which we have already referred Prof Mayo says 'One does not just do things; one does the sort of things one does because one is the sort of person one is. And, as Aristotle stresses, one becomes the sort of person one is by doing the sort of things one does'. One could scarcely come across a clearer case of leaving out the social dimensions of life than that. An extreme social view of the situation would be that one does the sort of things one does because of the social and role situations one is in and that one becomes the sort of person one is because of the social situations one has been in. A more moderate view would allow some place for personality in the psychological sense of the term by saying that one does the sort of things one does both because one is the sort of person one is and because of the social situations one is in. The other half of that view



would, but that one becomes the sort of person one is because of the interaction of the social situations one has been in and of one's biological inheritance and constitution. Because Mayo leaves out the social dimension of life he is guilty of individualising social phenomena. Very interestingly from the point of view of British academic philosophy Mayo is not being myopically analytic when he makes the point we have just quoted. On the contrary he is being commendably synoptic and is concerned to bring together the Kantian ethics of rules and of the right act and the Aristotelian ethics of character and of the good man. The fact that when he does so he is guilty of individualising social phenomena shows us that leaving out the social dimensions and aspects of life is in some ways a fundamental error of Western philosophy.

The error spreads far and wide beyond the limits of philosophy and we can study its grim and important ramification if we look at psychology and traditional criminology. Let us take psychology first. Since the word 'psychology' is, like the word 'philosophy', totally ambiguous it is perhaps as well to start off by saying that by psychology I mean academic and experimental psychology. In the BBC series of talks Conversations with Philosophers to which we have already referred one famous philosopher said that Freud was the only man of genius in psychology. For the man in the street who cannot distinguish between a psychologist and a psychiatrist and who has not the faintest idea what a clinical psychologist is that point of view may seem sound enough. It is however possible to argue strongly that Freud was not a psychologist at all and it is as well to remember that although he was almost certainly a psychiatrist a great many psychiatrists disagree strongly with his ideas. When we talk about psychology in this work we mean the subject of Binet, Bartlett and Piaget and also the subject of the psychologists to whose work we have referred from time

to time. Before we start to criticise psychologists it might be appropriate to praise them. We have seen that psychologists have said sound things about attitudes and about language learning. At the present time when many people including many philosophers who ought to know better have become uncritically enthusiastic about the work of Chomsky it has been left to psychologists to uphold the cause of scepticism and empiricism against a very fashionable and popular form of rationalism.

The trouble starts however when people assert that psychology is the scientific study of human behaviour. It would be much more reasonable to say that psychology is the study of certain fundamental elements or aspects of behaviour such as memory, perception and problem solving. Differential psychology can also tell us something about populations of people and about an individual person's standing in relation to the rest of a given population. The idea that one can in any acceptable sense study human behaviour by taking people into laboratories and performing experiments on them is an extraordinary one and strongly suggests that in its early days psychology made the mistake of accepting the methodology of nineteenth century biology. The first step in studying human behaviour is simply a matter of observing it carefully in its social context. Social anthropologists have known this for a long time and the ever growing tribe of ethnomethodologists are bringing it to our attention again at the present time. The motto of nineteenth century biology or at least the part of it that was concerned with morphology and morphological taxonomy may well have been 'first catch your specimen and then take it to the laboratory for examination.' Clearly specimens which are collected at random tell us everything about plant and animal morphology and dissections of both plants and animals are much more

satisfactorily carried out in a laboratory than elsewhere. But as soon as we take people into laboratories for the purposes of psychological experiment we place them in the role of subject in a psychological experiment and that role will influence their behaviour. In addition since human action and behaviour are essentially social a basic laboratory for the study of human behaviour would have to be a specially built small town. The study of human physiology is of course a very different matter and human metabolism can be studied by taking human specimens into laboratories because metabolism unlike action and behaviour is not a social matter. Some evidence is now required to support what we have been saying and it is provided in a concise and interesting form by Broadbent.

In his book In Defence of Empirical Psychology he introduces us as it were to the experimental psychologist when he says (p 5) 'traditionally, the pasture of experimental psychologist has been to show a low profile. He concerns himself with tiny details the learning of nonsense syllables, of the refinement of psychophysical methods, of the meaning to be attached to statistical tests using one tail rather than two tails of the distribution' and on the same page he talks about 'the concern of the experimental psychologist for detail, his apparent lack of interest in ideology and his reluctance to talk about broader issues' One can perhaps say at this stage that experimental psychologists have a lot in common with linguistic and analytic philosophers. Both groups approach human action in a totally misleading way. The case of the philosophers has been examined in chapter VI and Broadbent shows how close the psychologists' errors are to theirs when he writes (op cit pp 12 - 13)

Let us take an example of a human action. Being who I am, I



think naturally of the act of drinking a cup of tea. My hand moves out, contacts the handle of the cup, raises it to my lips, and tips the contents down my throat. But only in a very general and abstract sense can it be said that my picking up of a teacup today is the same as the operations which took place yesterday. Examination of the muscular contractions and detailed movements would show that they were quite different each time. To make observation easy, let us concentrate on one part of the process, the movement of my hand to the teacup. In order to get the measurements out into observable form, let us furthermore replace the motion of my hand, which is difficult to instrument satisfactorily, by the motion of some object under my control, which has got to be brought to a satisfactory coincidence with some target points.

I can now introduce an experimental facility which was for some years an ornament of our lab in Cambridge, and which was used by my colleague, Dr Hammerton. Outside our building, there is a large and attractive English garden; and across the back of the house there ran a small model railway. On this railway there was a trolley, which could run along the track; and at the side of the track were small target markers which lay concealed behind the track until the experimenter wanted them, but which when he chose could rise suddenly into a visible position standing at the side of the track.

The experimental subject was at the far end of the garden, and therefore as he looked in the direction of the laboratory, he saw the trolley move across his field of view. In one hand he held a small control, by moving which he could vary the speed of the trolley; so what he had to do was to watch for the target marker appearing somewhere in his range of vision, and then to move the trolley as fast as possible to line it up with the marker.

If one actually wishes to study tea drinking as opposed to games with model railways one has to consider its social context in relation to such factors as coffee drinking, the decline of tea rooms and the rise of Indian and Ceylon tea centres. Broadbent is not however interested in the act of drinking a cup of tea, he is interested in muscular co-ordination. And since muscular co-ordination is really virtually a physiological subject it can be appropriately studied by the use of specimens or subjects in psychological or physiological laboratories. Analysis leads Broadbent away from action to physiology when he writes 'My hand moves out, contacts the handle of the cup' raises it to my lips, and tips the contents down my throat.' Best of all the limitations of experimental technique are allowed to alter

what is being studied and so Broadbent writes 'To make observations easy let us concentrate on one part of the process, the movement of my hand to the teacup' The essentially social nature of action inevitably eludes those who are primarily interested in analysis and muscular contractions regardless of whether they are philosophers or psychologists.

What we are saying about psychology has been said before. Prof D G Ritchie who held the chair of logic and metaphysics at St Andrews until his death in 1903 wrote (Philosophical Studies (p 35)

'The truth is that there is no such thing as wholly individual experience beyond mere uninterpreted feeling and blind willing. It is human society, with its accumulated stock of concepts, that makes our experience a more or less organic system. The psychologists with their individualistic standpoint are, I think, responsible for much more confusion than even Mr Ward admits. It takes more than one man to know anything, or to have an ideal end for volition. Introducing Ward into the discussion at this point may help to make it respectable or at least so it seems to me since my earliest philosophical memory is of hearing a paternal account of what Prof G F Stout of St Andrews thought about Ward. More seriously we can see that perhaps ideas about the social nature of language are not nearly as recent as many people like to imagine. Ritchie also reminds us that at one time philosophers did not individualise social phenomena. Unfortunately however the neo Hegelian philosophers or at least some of them socialised individual phenomena to such an extent that they ended up by advocating social surgery by which they meant killing people.

One of the most disturbing cases of individualising social phenomena is criminology which rests to a large extent on a simple verbal confusion

The word 'criminal' gives rise to the word 'criminality' which has been reified into the subject matter of criminology. Recently a young psychologist took up a post at a prison and on his arrival he was told that he was expected to carry out research into some aspect of criminality. The young psychologist did not happen to believe in criminality and so he felt that his head of department's instruction was meaningless and could not be carried out. The other members of that psychology department spend their days carrying out research into aspects of criminality and at the same time pride themselves on their empirical and experimental approach to problems. If instead of talking about criminals and criminality we talk about law breakers and law breaking, we at once cease to individualise social phenomena and become aware of the cause of crime which is the criminal law and its agencies such as the criminal courts and the police. The abolition of the criminal law and its agencies will at a stroke abolish crime. We may feel that the price is too high to pay and that some rather nasty feuds and vendettas might break out if the criminal law were removed. But there is no excuse for continuing to establish chairs in criminology and for continuing to promote research into aspects of criminality. Those who are interested in reifications can always turn their attention to substance which can be regarded as a reification of the logical notion of subject in the sense of the subject of a proposition. At this point perhaps we should notice how sad it is that very few philosophers have been involved in elucidating the problems of criminology and in supporting the vital work of those concerned with deviance theory. Prof Flew is perhaps the major exception here, and his suggestion in his book Crime or Disease? that criminology should be renamed 'Home Office Studies' reminds us that the confusions of traditional criminology complement the confusions of those whose misfortune in



life it is to run a penal system.

Now perhaps we should say something more about the study of criminality and also consider the idea that it is possible to have a situation in which there is criminal law along with its associated agencies but no criminals or criminal law breakers. For Lombroso, the founding father of criminology, criminals were obviously different from other people because their facial features were different from those of non criminals. That idea strikes us as amusing now but some of those who laugh at it seem to be unable to see that undertaking a study of the physique of borstal boys and carrying out research into the perceptual and cognitive differences between criminals and non criminals are just as amusing. Such enterprises which have been or are being undertaken are simply slightly sophisticated versions of Lombroso's original idea that criminals are different in biological and psychological ways from the rest of us. Not very surprisingly no one has yet been able to tell us what criminality is and amongst traditional criminologists one can now meet the idea that criminality should not be regarded as a monolithic concept. Since property offences are very different from sexual offences it is said that one should expect to find that the criminality of property offenders is very different from the criminality of sexual offenders. Motoring offenders one presumes have yet another type of criminality. At this point the criminality game is really up and it should be obvious that all that criminals have in common is the fact that they have been convicted of offences against the criminal law which concerns itself with a wide variety of activities including forgery, sex and motoring.

It is possible to imagine a state of affairs in which the criminal law and its agencies are totally inactive. In such a state of affairs criminal judges snore endlessly in their clubs, members of the criminal

bar wonder if being a judge is actually more boring than being a barrister and policemen devote all their time to helping old women across the roads. But as long as policemen are encouraged to regard criminal prosecutions as a good thing there is no chance of such a state of affairs actually appearing in our midst. A good example of this point is provided by Dr Stanley Cohen in his book Folk Devils and Moral Panics where he writes (pp 166 - 167)

The police - the main control agents operating during the impact period - had two types of effect on the behaviour; the one immediate and the other more sustained. The immediate effect of police policy and action was to create deviance - not only in the sense of provoking the more labile members of the crowd into losing their tempers but in Becker's sense of making the rules whose infraction constituted deviance. The type of control tactics adopted by the police under the impact of sensitization and symbolization involved a certain arbitrary element. The practice, for example, of designating certain areas in advance as 'trouble spots' meant that youths with the appropriate symbols could be moved along even if they were causing no apparent harm. In one case in the Brighton court, a constable from Eastbourne, who had been helping the local force, gave evidence that he had seen a number of youths standing under a bus shelter; they were not doing anything, but he 'had heard that this was a trouble spot' and had told them to move away. Not all moved away quickly enough one was arrested. 'If you allow him to get away with what he did', the constable told the court, 'and not move when the police told him to, then others would be free to come down. It was necessary in the public's interest that these youths should not shelter from the rain in this particular shelter.'

Another example is given by Mr P Zwart in his book on Islington where he tells us (p 163) that when Winston Churchill was Home Secretary it was said that many of the boys who at that time were in prison for using obscene language had simply put their tongues out at policemen. It is possible to argue at the present time that the Industrial Relations Court is provoking certain trade unions and trade unionists in the way that the police sometimes provoke some people. That point may not tell us very much about courts in general

because the Industrial Relations Court is not exactly like other courts. In a recent BBC radio talk Prof Vaisey pointed out that if a judge frequently asserts in public that he is a judge just like any other judge and that his court is a court just like any other court then the very fact that these assertions are made suggests that they are false. And such assertions are evidently made in the Industrial Relations Court. Possibly we can say however that the Industrial Relations Court does show us that criminal law agencies other than the police can at times play an active part in the creation of crime.

Although in a fundamental sense all crime is caused by the criminal law not all crime is caused by the agencies of the criminal law and so not all crime is like the rather exceptional cases we have just been looking at. One possible answer to the question 'why do people break the criminal law when they are not actively provoked by the criminal law agencies?' may be that parts of the criminal law are opposed to the interests of large sections of the population. All that we can say about criminals in general is that they tend to be young, male and working class. Many of the laws about property may not reflect the interests of such people or at least they may not if they are taken in conjunction with the present distribution of property in our society. But in any event looking at the interests of law breakers in relation to the interests of law makers places the study of crime in its correct social and sociological context and takes us away from the individualising of social phenomena which leads to criminology and the belief in criminality.

A discussion of the ramifications of individualising social phenomena could go on endlessly but perhaps we have said enough for our purposes. Since quotations have been something of a feature of this work it is perhaps fitting that we should end by looking at the conclusion of



Prof R W Balch's article The Police Mentality: Fact or Fiction? where he writes

The controversy over the police mentality will probably persist for some time to come. There is simply not enough good evidence to support or refute any side of the controversy. Even the existence of modal personality characteristics among policemen is open to serious question. The devotion of social scientists to the personality model has obscured the important role that organizational factors play in shaping police behaviour. Attracting better people to the same old job is not necessarily an improvement. In the case of police work, it may simply mean, that college graduates will be 'busting heads' instead of high school drop outs.

Prof Balch only hints at the error of individualising social phenomena but he reminds us of the dangers of psychologising and of the importance of roles. In addition he indirectly points out that those who hope to change or reform or alter society through education make a serious mistake. Altering social structure and social roles is the only way of altering society. A sound education may of course help people to bring about social change in the sense of altering social structures but what it cannot do is to reform society by filling the existing social structure with superior people who preserve the status quo. It is unfortunate that Balch seems to make the mistake that we found a philosopher making at one stage of regarding psychologists as the only social scientists. In fact calling them social scientists is a serious linguistic mistake. Sociologists who are paradigm cases of social scientists certainly cannot be accused of devotion to the personality model. Looking at the grim prospect of college graduate policemen 'busting heads' is perhaps an appropriate way in which to end an academic study of the concepts of a person and of human action that has, with I hope some justification, paid a considerable amount of attention to roles.

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